

Fire-resistant landscaping tips for front and back yards

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Fire-resistant shrub: bearberry cotoneaster

Photos Jenn Freedman

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker reinforces the importance of firescaping: “MOFD encourages residents to consider fire resistant landscaping to increase the defensible space around homes and to make our community more resilient and prepared for a wildfire event. These passive measures significantly increase the survivability of homes and will dramatically slow the advance of fire, giving responders valuable time to suppress a fire before it spreads.”

While there are many choices for fire-resistant plants, examples of safer plants suitable for Lamorinda specifically include:

- Trees: western redbud, citrus, coast live oak, Carolina laurel cherry;
- Shrubs: aloe, coffeeberry, bush morning glory, pomegranate, Italian buckthorn, currant;
- Groundcover: bearberry cotoneaster, carpet bugle, candytuft, trailing South African daisy, fan flower; and
- Vines: cape honeysuckle, and potato vine.

For a comprehensive list of plants with favorable and unfavorable fire performance ratings, visit diablofiresafe.org/tolerance. Local nurseries, like Orchard Nursery in Lafayette, McDonnell Nursery in Orinda or the Moraga Garden Center, can also offer guidance on fire-resistant plants available locally. A plant’s fire resistance can be seriously compromised if not maintained: plants not properly irrigated or pruned have an increased fire risk.

Landscape contractors can offer guidance for firescaping your specific home as well as solid plant choices, such as Christian Ehrhorn of Misty Morning Gardens



Fire-resistant shrub: aloe

Photos Jenn Freedman

in Orinda. “When I design landscapes that require buffers from fire-prone areas, employing plant species and natives such as Coffeeberry and Cotoneaster are solid choices. When these types of low-growing dense species are planted in broad areas and combined with permeable hardscape elements like gravel or decomposed granite, they can act as a fire break.”

Plants not recommended for fire-prone areas generally have a low-moisture content, high percentage of dead matter/debris, and/or a high surface area to volume ratio. Examples of trees that fall into this unfavorable bucket include fir, spruce, and eucalyptus.

Ensuring we adhere to firescaping guidelines will safeguard our community into next summer and beyond.