

# Gardening Basics

## Landscaping to Reduce Fire Risk

According to the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), Denton County is in severe drought as of January 27, 2022. Some parts of north Texas along the Red River are in extreme drought. In 2021, Denton County received about half the average rainfall, around 5 inches less in the last three months. The National Weather Service predicts the drought conditions in North Texas to continue due to the La Niña winter weather conditions, which tend to be drier and warmer than average across the southern U.S.

### Steps to Reduce the Risk of Fire Around Your Home:

Create and maintain defensible space and buffer between your home and other structures and the grass, trees, and shrubs in your landscape or adjacent wildscape areas. Embers and small flames pose the most significant fire risk to your home. These steps will reduce the fire risk to your home.



Pacific Southwest Forest Service, USDA/Flickr/CC BY 2.0

The National Fire Protection Association defines three Ignition Zones around your home:

- Immediate Zone - zero to five feet from your home.
- Intermediate Zone – five to 30 feet out
- Extended Zone - 30 to 100 feet from your home.

The actions to take in each zone are a bit different.

### Immediate Zone Actions are the most critical (zero to five feet from your home).

- **Maintain and clean the building structures** (house, storage buildings, etc.)
  - Clean gutters and roofs of plant debris.
  - Repair roof shingles, broken windows, and window screens.

- Remove debris from the eave and attic vents and cover with a 1/8" metal mesh screen.
- **Improve the fire resistance** of your landscape
  - Remove branches that overhang the roof and dead branches at least 10 feet from the chimneys.
  - Use non-flammable mulch such as gravel or rock in combination with bark mulch in the root zone of plants, particularly at the foundation of buildings.
  - Remove flammable material from wall exteriors – leaves, needles, firewood piles. And remove anything stored under decks or porches.
  - Provide supplemental water to plants closest to your home.

### **Intermediate Zone Actions (5 to 30 feet from the home's exterior)**

- **Clear vegetation** under trees and stationary propane tanks.
- **Prune tree limbs** 6 to 10 feet from the ground or 1/3 of the tree height for smaller trees.
- **Mow the lawn and native grasses** to no higher than 4 inches.

### **Extended Zone Actions (30 to 100 feet from the home's exterior)**

- **Remove vegetation**, dead plant, and dead tree material next to storage sheds, outbuildings, and landscape and adjacent wooded areas.
- **Remove small conifers** between mature trees.
- **Use a fire-resistant landscape design** as you plan updates to your landscape, and surround your home with things less likely to burn that are still beautiful and easy to maintain.

### **Choose fire-resistant plants.**

No plant is fire-proof, but some are more heat tolerant. The characteristics of fire-resistant plants include moist, supple leaves, water-like sap or resin, with low sap or resin materials. Most deciduous trees and shrubs are fire-resistant. Highly flammable plants tend to have fine, dry leaves or dead material; leaves, twigs, and stems contain volatile substances (waxes, terpenes, oils); gummy, resinous sap with a strong odor; loose or papery bark. Examples Reduce spreading or upright juniper, cypress, arborvitae, and bamboo.

Find fire-resistant plants suitable for North Texas at [Texas A&M University Earth-Kind® Plant Selector](#) and "[Firewise Landscaping in Texas](#)"

### **Add fire breaks to your landscape,**

such as sidewalks, gravel paths, and steppingstones. Break up planting areas with decorative rock. Use non-flammable mulch close to your home. Plan your landscape with small irregular clusters of plants rather than large masses. Remove trees from the Immediate Ignition Zone, and space trees further out in your landscape (5 – 30 ft) at least 18 feet between the tree canopies.

Learn more about protecting your home from a fire at these websites:

National Fire Protection Association, "[Preparing Homes for Wildfire](#)"

Fire Safe Marin, "[Create a Fire-Safe Yard](#),"

Oregon State University, "[Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes](#)"

### **References:**

[NIDIS: National Integrated Drought Information System](#)

[Wildfire Risks to Communities](#)