



Creating defensible space is your front-line protection against wildfires. GRAPHIC COURTESY OF NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION

Is Your Home Prepared for **Wildfire Season?**

Prepare your home and yard for wildfire season

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As the first signs of summer pop up in Klickitat County, it's a great time to start thinking ahead to wildfire season and take care of the annual maintenance tasks that will help keep your home and property protected.

Although it might sound strange, your house and outbuildings are sources of fuel for a fire, just like trees and other flammable vegetation. To help your home survive a wildfire, you can create and maintain defensible space between your home and its surroundings. Defensible space can break up a fire's path

from wildland vegetation to your home and give firefighters an opportunity to safely defend your home and other structures from a wildfire.

There are three zones of defensible space. Here are some annual maintenance tips that can be done in the early spring to improve your defensible space within the zones:

Zone 1 is the immediate 0-5 feet around your house or outbuildings, which should be free of all combustible material. This area needs to have a very low potential for ignition from flying embers. Use gravel, rock mulches or hard surfaces, such as brick and pavers. If you heat your home with wood in the winter, spring is the time to move your remaining woodpile away from the house. Consider keeping your woodpile at least 30 feet from all structures. Replace wood mulches around the base of your home with non-combustible alternatives.

The intermediate zone, Zone 2, is 5-30 feet from your structures, which should be “lean, clean and green.” Lean means shrubs and bushes and other vegetation are minimal. Clean means there is no accumulation of dead vegetation or flammable debris within this area. Green means that plants are kept healthy, green and sufficiently watered from now through fire season.

Zone 3 extends from 30 feet to at least 100 feet, and up to 200 feet on steeper slopes with thicker vegetation. This zone often includes maintained yards and naturally occurring vegetation, such as conifer and hardwood trees, brush, weeds and grass. In this zone, dead fine vegetation like dead shrubs and accumulations of woody debris and leaves should be removed annually. Also, to reduce the chance of fire spreading from treetop to treetop, create space—10 feet or more—between individual trees, or clusters of trees, through thinning and pruning. To help keep ground fires from climbing into the canopy, remove “ladder fuels,” such as shrubs under trees and low-hanging tree branches. Remove branches up to 10 feet above the ground in mature trees and up to one-third of the canopy in smaller trees. Note that fall and winter are the best times to prune conifer trees; hardwoods are best pruned in spring.

Finally, a properly maintained driveway provides a safe access and escape route to and from your home. If firefighters can't see a safe path down your driveway, they may not enter. Check your driveway each winter for encroaching brush or overhanging tree limbs. Strive for at least 13.5 feet of vertical clearance and trim brush back 10 feet or more from the edge of the driveway. Make sure your address signs are visible so emergency responders can find you.

While it may feel far away, wildfire season will be upon us soon. Let's all do our part to keep wildfires from having negative consequences in our communities by taking care of the annual maintenance tasks that we can do right now in order to prepare ourselves.

If you are interested in additional information and resources related to fire preparedness, check out the OSU Extension Fire Program's webinar series at extension.oregonstate.edu/fire-program/ online-webinar-guide.

Three Zones of Defensible Space

