

Our Future in Our Hands

*Reduce the impact a wildfire might have
on you and your community*



Oregon State
University

FORESTRY & NATURAL RESOURCES EXTENSION FIRE PROGRAM

Prepare Your Home

EM 9404-b

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Prepare Your Home

- ➔ Practical steps you can take to reduce fire risk to your home and the area around it

The number and size of wildfires across the western United States have dramatically increased, affecting many communities. Thankfully, there are basic and affordable actions you can take to protect your home.

Why homes burn

Embers are a major reason why homes are destroyed during a wildfire. Embers are pieces of burning matter from the fire. Wind can carry embers far away from the active fire area. If these embers land on materials that are burnable on or near a house, the home will be at risk of burning.

Preparing your home and the area around your home for wildfire and embers can help protect you and your community.

Start with your home

The chances that your home makes it through a wildfire depend on the materials used to build it and the burnable material around it. Here are some tips for basic and affordable actions you can take around your home.

- Walk around the outside of your home. What do you see? Are leaves and needles piling against your home, under the deck or in the gutters? Where burnable material collects, embers will also collect and ignite your house. Regularly remove this material from the area outside your home, including your roof and gutters.



- Try to keep anything that might burn from touching or hanging over your home. Are plants or landscape materials such as bark mulch touching your home? Are tree branches hanging over your roof? Trim plants and trees and use nonburnable landscape materials like rocks and concrete pavers in place of wood and bark mulch.
- Remove any other burnable materials from the outside of your home. Wood piles, wood patio furniture or doormats can also catch fire.
- Use fire-resistant building materials. Affordable fire-resistant building materials and home maintenance supplies may be available at places like Habitat for Humanity ReStores, businesses or local organizations.

The area around your home

After assessing your home and its immediate area, check other areas around it like your yard.

- Keep grass mowed and all plants watered.
- Remove dead or dried plant materials, including fallen needles and leaves.
- Trim low tree branches.
- Provide spacing between shrubs and trees. Don't let small trees or shrubs grow right under big trees or in a tight row or hedge. Fire can easily travel from plant to plant when they are close together.



“*Keep outside the home clear! Make sure home is stocked! Communication! Love! Thank those who help out!*”

— *Melissa B.*



- Choose fire-resistant plants. These types of plants have characteristics that make them harder to burn. For example, they have leaves rather than needles and are not oily or waxy. However, even fire-resistant plants can burn if they are not maintained in a healthy condition or have been growing without water for a long time.
- Talk with your neighbors. Encourage your neighbors to protect their homes and property. Improve your situation by working together.

Access to your home

Suppose a wildfire does occur in your community and is threatening your home. In that case, firefighters will need access to your home while maintaining their safety. Here is what you can do to help make this easier for firefighters:

- Ensure street names and house or apartment numbers are clearly marked.
- Be sure your driveway is clear of vegetation, including branches, shrubs and trees. If vegetation hangs too low or crowds the sides of your driveway, a fire truck could be unable to drive in.
- Evacuation orders are typically given by local sheriff's deputies, police or state police. However, if a firefighter tells you to evacuate, you should do so for your safety and the safety of the firefighters.

Photo: Melissa B. and her family enjoy Latino Fest in Madras, OR, while talking to OSU Extension about wildfire preparedness. Credit: Ariel Cowan, © Oregon State University.

Preparing your home and the surrounding area before a wildfire can help reduce the risk of flames or embers destroying your home. Some of these actions can be accomplished in a few hours, while some can take more time, effort or money.

If you need help, ask neighbors, a property manager, friends, community groups, city government or your local fire department. Organize a work party to help each other prepare. If you rent a house or apartment, talk to the property manager about what they can do to keep you, your family and your belongings safe from wildfire.

RESOURCES

- » Frequently asked questions about defensible space, Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal, <https://beav.es/SDj>
- » Defensible space tips to protect your home from wildfire, Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal, <https://beav.es/SD9>
- » Habitat for Humanity ReStores, <https://www.habitat.org/restores>
- » Fire-resistant Plants for Home Landscapes, Oregon State University Extension, <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw590>



Want to learn more?

Discover the other chapters of this guide for more tips on how to prepare for a wildfire:

- ▼ Make a Plan
EM 9404-a
- ▼ Care for Your Mental Health
EM 9404-c
- ▼ Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke
EM 9404-d



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