



Expert tip

Prune trees around your house so that branches are a minimum of two metres away from roofs and walls. Under-prune all established trees to two metres above ground level. Prunings can be shredded and composted.

Fire beaters

Here are a few tips for landscaping and reducing risk in bushfire-prone areas

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Tip 1: Low-flammability plants

If you live in a bushfire-prone area there's a lot you can do to with your landscape to avoid increasing the fire hazard around your home. Planting is a good place to start. You need plants that are slow to burn, such as those with thick, fleshy leaves (like succulents and some rainforest species), smooth bark which doesn't catch alight easily (such as spotted gums), and plants which don't contain large quantities of flammable oils or chemicals (such as lilly pilly and many deciduous trees).

Tip 2: Keep your distance

Separate garden beds into pockets of vegetation rather than having long continuous garden beds. Not only should garden beds be separated at ground level, there should be space between low plants and tree branches. This could mean the difference between fire spreading through plant layers or not. Locate sheds, woodpiles, compost heaps and flammable liquids well away from the house and any down slope leading to the house.

Tip 3: Non-flammable materials

Use gravel, crushed sandstone or pebbles as mulch rather than woodchip or straw mulch, as fine organic matter along the ground surface is fuel for fires. Use non-flammable materials for fences, retaining walls and patios (such

as metal fencing, masonry walling and paved patios rather than decking). Use non-flammable outdoor surface materials which are easy to rake and clean of leaves and debris.

Tip 4: Regular maintenance

If you already have large trees close to the house, keep them well pruned so they don't overhang gutters. When planning a new garden, avoid planting large shrubs or trees next to the house or outdoor structures. Keep gutters free of leaves. Also, regularly remove dead branches, foliage and bark from the lawn and garden areas close to the house. These can be composted or taken to the tip.

Tip 5: Buffers and windbreaks

Create and maintain an area of lawn or paving adjacent to the house to separate the residence from potential fire hazards. A swimming pool next to the house is another form of fire break. Vegetable gardens are also a good buffer between the fire hazard and a home, as they are kept well watered. A windbreak of trees can catch wind-borne embers if there is enough distance between the house and the windbreak – this is most appropriate on larger rural properties and of course they need to be the right kinds of trees.

Tip 6: Get expert advice

The advice presented here is general in nature so you need to become familiar with

ABOVE LEFT Many succulents, with their thick and fleshy leaves, are considered to be low-flammability plants.

ABOVE Use non-organic mulch such as pebbles and rocks, especially in areas that are adjacent to the house.

all the ways you can reduce bushfire hazards around your specific property and the rules and regulations in your local council area and state. For this, contact your council and your state Rural Fire Service. You can also hire a bushfire consultant who can help identify your Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) and hazard reduction requirements. Many landscape designers are also familiar with bushfire landscape requirements. ■

Prepared by Jacki Brown and the ecodesign team on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). www.aildm.com.au

Did you know?

- Plants with thick, fleshy leaves, plants with a high salt content in the leaves and those with viscous, milky sap and leathery leaves are often hard to burn and are considered to have low flammability.
- Plants with dense foliage are better than those with open airy crowns; plants that don't retain dead material are better than those that hold lots of fuel; plants with smooth bark are better than those with stringy bark.