

Forest Gate Fire Mitigation Guidelines

April 2015

The goal is to protect our homes, preserve property values and create a healthy forest in Forest Gate as well as becoming a Nationally Recognized FireWise Community . We recognize that fire mitigation (or the lack thereof) on any lot can impact the safety and value of adjacent lots and our development as a whole. Therefore, we urge all owners to adopt these minimum guidelines.

If you have not done so already, we also recommend you contact the Black Forest Fire Department for a FireWise assessment (719-495-4300). There is no charge and they will provide customized advice for your property.

The primary goal for FireWise landscaping is fuel reduction — limiting the level of flammable vegetation (native and planted) and materials surrounding the home and increasing the moisture content of remaining vegetation. This includes the entire ‘home ignition zone’ which extends to 200 feet or more on densely treed lots. Zone width is a minimum on flat ground. Zones should be increased downhill on slopes. The information for the guidelines outlined below has been taken from the following sources; The High Forest Ranch Guidelines, Forest Gate Restrictions and Covenants Second Amendment, El Paso County Slash-Mulch Program Forestry Info Guide and the Colorado State Forest Service Quick Guide Series (http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/FIRE2012_1_DspaceQuickGuide.pdf) **Keep in mind these are only guidelines and that every lot in Forest Gate is different. We understand home and lot owners will approach fire mitigation differently. However the main objective is to make Forest Gate as safe as possible from wild fires. We would like every home /lot owner to do what they can to make Forest Gate as safe possible from wild fires.**

Fire Mitigation is outlined in 3 zones below

Zone 1 The width of Zone 1 extends a minimum distance of 15-30 feet outward from all structures, depending on property size. Most flammable vegetation is removed in this zone, with the possible exception of a few low-growing shrubs or fire-resistant plants. **Avoid landscaping with common ground junipers, which are highly flammable.**

1. Install nonflammable ground cover and plant nothing within the first 5 feet of the house and decks. This critical step will help prevent flames from coming into direct contact with the structure. This is particularly important if a building is sided with wood, logs or other flammable materials. Decorative rock creates an attractive, easily maintained, nonflammable ground cover.
2. If a structure has noncombustible siding (i.e., stucco, synthetic stucco, Concrete, stone or brick), widely spaced foundation plantings of low-growing shrubs or other fire-resistant plant materials are acceptable. However, do not plant directly under windows or next to foundation vents, and be sure areas of continuous grass are not adjacent to plantings. Information on fire-resistant plants is available on the CSFS website at www.csfs.colostate.edu.
3. Clear roofs and gutters of needles and other flammable debris.
4. Create a ‘fuel-free’ area within five feet of the home, using non-flammable landscaping materials (i.e., no wood mulch or pine needles) planted with high-moisture-content annuals and perennials.
5. Plants should be carefully spaced, low-growing and free of resins, oils and waxes that burn easily, i.e., no junipers. No shrubs should be planted near windows or foundation vents.

6. Mow the lawn regularly to maintain a grass height of <4".
7. Remove all ladder fuels. Ladder fuels are low branches, shrubs or small trees beneath larger trees that provide a path for ground fire to reach the tree tops. Ideally, remove all trees from Zone 1 to reduce fire hazards. The more trees you remove, the safer your home will be.
If you do keep any trees in this zone, consider them part of the structure and extend the distance of the entire defensible space accordingly. Remove any branches that overhang or touch the roof, and remove all fuels within 10 feet of the chimney.
8. Remove dead vegetation from under decks and within 25 feet of house.
9. Never store firewood, lumber or combustible material underneath a deck, even in winter.
10. Consider fire-resistant material for patio furniture, swing sets, etc.
11. Remove slash, wood chips and other woody debris.
12. Inspect yearly and maintain as needed to ensure continued effectiveness.

Zone 2. Zone 2 is an area of fuels reduction designed to diminish the intensity of a fire approaching your home. The width of Zone 2 depends on the slope of the ground where the structure is built. Typically, the defensible space in Zone 2 should extend at least 100 feet from all structures. If this distance stretches beyond your property lines, try to work with the adjoining property owners to complete an appropriate defensible space.

The following actions help reduce continuous fuels surrounding a structure, while enhancing home safety and the aesthetics of the property. They also will provide a safer environment for firefighters to protect your home.

Tree Thinning and Pruning

1. Remove stressed, diseased, dead or dying trees and shrubs. This reduces the amount of vegetation available to burn, and makes the forest healthier.
2. Remove enough trees and large shrubs to create at least 10 feet between crowns. Crown separation is measured from the outermost branch of one tree to the nearest branch on the next tree. On steep slopes, increase the distance between tree crowns even more.
3. Remove all ladder fuels from under remaining trees. Prune tree branches off the trunk to a height of 8 feet from the ground or 1/3 the height of the tree, whichever is less.
4. **Thin groups of "Dog Hair" trees.** "Dog Hair" is a common term used to describe a group of trees growing so closely together that they are as thick as "hair on a dog's back". The rule of thumb for minimal thinning is remove enough so that the branches do not touch.
5. If your driveway extends more than 100 feet from your home, **thin out trees** to create a buffer along both sides of your driveway, all the way to the main access road. Again, thin all trees to create 10-foot spacing between tree crowns. This will create a fire break.

6. Small groups of two or three trees may be left in some areas of Zone 2, but leave a minimum of 30 feet between the crowns of these clumps and surrounding trees.
7. Because Zone 2 forms an aesthetic buffer and provides a transition between zones, it is necessary to blend the requirements for Zones 1 and 3. For example, if you have a tree in Zone 2 with branches extending into Zone 1, the tree can be retained if there is proper crown spacing.
8. Limit the number of dead trees (snags) to one or two per acre. Be sure snags cannot fall onto the house, power lines, roads or driveways.
9. As in Zone 1, the more trees and shrubs removed, the more likely your house will survive a wildfire.

Shrub Thinning/Pruning and Surface Fuels

10. Isolated shrubs may be retained in Zone 2, provided they are not growing under trees.
11. Keep shrubs at least 10 feet away from the edge of tree branches. This will prevent the shrubs from becoming ladder fuels.
Example – For shrubs 6 feet high, spacing between shrub clumps should be 15 feet or more (measured from the edge of the crowns of vegetation clumps). The diameter of these shrub clumps should not exceed 12 feet
12. Periodically prune and maintain shrubs to prevent excessive growth, and remove dead stems from shrubs annually. Common ground junipers should be removed whenever possible because they are highly flammable and tend to hold a layer of duff beneath them.
13. Mow or trim wild grasses to a maximum height of 6 inches. This is especially critical in the fall, when grasses dry out.
14. Avoid accumulations of surface fuels, such as logs, branches, slash and wood chips greater than 4 inches deep.

Zone 3 is 100 to 200 feet from the home (or to the property line for heavily treed lots). Thin this area to create a healthy forest, although less space is required than in Zone 2. *This standard also applies to all vacant lots. Many thinning strategies can be employed in this zone to achieve the owner's objectives. Consultation with a qualified forester or the Black Forest Fire Department is recommended to determine the best management strategy.*

1. Mow grass at least annually to 6" to reduce ground fire fuel.
2. Thin groups of "Dog Hair" as noted in Zone 2.
3. Remove smaller conifers that are growing between taller trees
4. Remove heavy accumulation of woody debris or large deadwood.
5. Prune tree branches to eliminate any foliage within 5 feet of the ground (greater ground clearance is desirable).
6. **Reduce the density of old and tall trees so crowns are not touching. Removal of very old and tall trees is a very hard decision to make. These trees are one of the reasons we all love living in the forest. However this is one of the main reasons Black Forest has become overgrown and ripe for wild fires, especially crown fires. Thinning of these trees and creating open space is the most recognized way of**

returning to a healthy forest and providing home owners with a safer environment. Having open spaces was the way Black Forest used to be many years ago. In fact our development had open spaces where cattle use to graze.

7. Trees to remove first should be small diameter trees crowded or overtopped by dominant trees.
8. Strive to create a diverse forest with a variety of tree ages.

Beyond Zone 3 *for lightly wooded or meadow areas. Also applies to vacant lots.*

1. Mow grass at least annually to 6" to reduce ground fire fuel.
2. Remove heavy accumulation of woody debris or large deadwood.

NOTE: Removal of any trees with a diameter >6 inches or greater must be in accordance with use restrictions paragraph 20 (Existing Vegetation) of the Forest Gate covenants.