

Fire-Resistant Plants for Oregon Home Landscapes

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Introduction

When landscaping around a home, most homeowners are interested in creating a landscape that is aesthetically pleasing, complements their home, and has variations in color, texture, flowers, and foliage. If your home is located in or adjacent to forests or rangeland, you also should consider the flammability of plants within your home landscape.

Flammable plant material in your landscape can increase the fire-risk around your home. The 1991 Oakland Hills Fire in California is a prime example of how flammable plant material (Eucalyptus trees) can act as fuel and contribute to the intensity of a wildfire. Over 3,000 homes were destroyed in that devastating wildfire.

Therefore, homeowners should take active steps to minimize or reduce the fuel and fire-hazard around their homes, *including* planting fire-resistant plants. Good placement of fire-resistant trees, for example, can, in fact, help protect your home by blocking intense heat.

There is a wide array of trees and other plants to choose for your landscape that are both attractive (Figure 1) and fire-safe. This publication provides a diverse list of plant material divided into perennials, groundcovers, trees, and shrubs.

What are fire-resistant plants?

Fire resistant plants are plants that don't readily ignite from a flame or other ignition sources. Although fire-resistant plants can be damaged or even killed by fire, their foliage and stems don't



Figure 1. Basket-of-Gold beneath Quaking Aspen; both are fire-resistant.

contribute significantly to the fuel and, therefore, the fire's intensity.

Plants that are fire-resistant have the following characteristics:

- Leaves are moist and supple.
- Plants that have little dead wood and tend not to accumulate dry, dead material within the plant.
- Sap is water-like and does not have a strong odor.

Most deciduous trees and shrubs are fire-resistant. However, it's important to remember that even fire-resistant plants can burn, particularly if they are not maintained in a healthy condition.

In contrast, plants that are highly flammable have these general characteristics:

- Contain fine, dry or dead material within the plant such as twigs, needles, and leaves.

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Fire-Resistant Plant Materials for Oregon

Groundcovers 18" and lower

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Carpet bugle	<i>Echeveria species</i>	Hens and chicks
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Kinnikinnick	<i>Fragaria species</i>	Wild strawberry
<i>Ceanothus prostratus</i>	Squaw carpet (C,E,S)	<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>	Japanese pachysandra (W,S)
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	Snow -in-summer	<i>Phlox subulata</i>	Creeping phlox
<i>Delosperma nubigenum</i>	Yellow iceplant	<i>Sedum species</i>	Sedum or stonecrops
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i>	Purple/Pink iceplant	<i>Thymus praecox</i>	Creeping thyme
<i>Duchesnea indica</i>	Mock strawberry	<i>Vinca minor</i>	Periwinkle

Perennials 18" or taller

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Achillea species</i>	Yarrow	<i>Hemerocallis hybrids</i>	Daylilies
<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	Chives	<i>Heuchera species</i>	Coral bells
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Sea thrift	<i>Hosta species</i>	Hosta lilies
<i>Aurinia saxatile</i>	Basket-of-Gold	<i>Iris species</i>	Iris
<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>	Heartleaf bergenia	<i>Kniphofia uvuria</i>	Red-hot poker
<i>Carex species</i>	Sedges	<i>Linum perenne</i>	Blue flax
<i>Coreopsis species</i>	Coreopsis	<i>Lupinus species</i>	Lupine
<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>	Fireweed	<i>Oenothera missouriensis</i>	Evening primrose
<i>Geranium species</i>	Hardy geraniums	<i>Penstemon species</i>	Penstemon
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Sun rose	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	Lamb's ear

Shrubs—broadleaf evergreen

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Cotoneaster species</i>	Cotoneaster	<i>Mahonia repens</i>	Creeping holly
<i>Daphne x burkwoodii</i> var. 'Carol Mackie'	Carol Mackie daphne	<i>Pachystima myrsinites</i>	Oregon boxwood
<i>Gaultheria shallon</i>	Salal (S,W)	<i>Rhododendron macrophyllum</i>	Pacific rhododendron (S,W)
<i>Ligustrum species</i>	Privet	<i>Rhododendron occidentale</i>	Western azalea (S,W)
<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>	Oregon grapeholly	<i>Yucca species</i>	Yucca

Shrubs—deciduous

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Acer circinatum</i>	Vine maple	<i>Philadelphus species</i>	Mockorange
<i>Acer glabrum</i>	Rocky Mountain maple	<i>Rhus species</i>	Sumac
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Pacific serviceberry	<i>Ribes species</i>	Currant
<i>Buddleia davidii</i>	Butterfly bush	<i>Rosa woodsii</i>	Wood's rose
<i>Caryopeteris x clandonensis</i>	Blue-mist spirea	<i>Spiraea x bumalda 'Goldflame'</i>	Goldflame spirea
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i>	Redtwig dogwood	<i>Spiraea douglasii</i>	Western spirea
<i>Euonymus alatus</i>	Burning bush	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Snowberry
<i>Holodiscus discolor</i>	Oceanspray	<i>Syringa species</i>	Lilac

Trees—evergreens

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Larix occidentalis</i>	Western larch (C,E)	<i>Pinus lambertiana</i>	Sugar pine (C,S)
<i>Pinus contorta</i> var. <i>contorta</i> and var. <i>murrayana</i>	Lodgepole pine	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>	Ponderosa pine

Trees—deciduous

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Acer macrophyllum</i>	Bigleaf maple (S,W)	<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>	Honeylocust
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway maple	<i>Gymnocladus dioica</i>	Kentucky coffee tree
<i>Acer rubra</i> var. <i>Sunset</i>	Sunset maple	<i>Juglans species</i>	Walnut
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Horsechestnut	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	American sweetgum (S,W)
<i>Alnus rubra</i>	Red alder (S,W)	<i>Malus species</i>	Crabapple
<i>Alnus tenuifolia</i>	Mountain alder (C,E)	<i>Populus species</i>	Aspen/cottonwoods
<i>Betula species</i>	Birch	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Chokecherry
<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>	Western catalpa	<i>Quercus garryana</i>	Oregon white oak (S,W)
<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Common hackberry	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	Pin oak
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Eastern redbud	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Red oak
<i>Cornus florida</i>	Flowering dogwood (S,W)	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	Black locust
<i>Fagus species</i>	Beech	<i>Salix species</i>	Willow
<i>Fraxinus species</i>	Ash	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Mountain ash

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- Leaves, twigs, and stems contain volatile waxes, terpenes, or oils.
- Leaves are aromatic (strong smell when crushed)
- Sap is gummy, resinous and has a strong odor.
- May have loose or papery bark.

Both ornamental and native plants can be highly flammable. An example of a highly flammable ornamental shrub often planted in home landscapes is ornamental juniper. Examples of highly flammable native shrubs include bitterbrush, manzanita, sagebrush, and ceanothus. Avoid planting these plants around your home.

-Adapted from University of California Cooperative Extension Hortscript, 1996, No. 18.

How this list was developed

This list was developed by evaluating fire-resistant plant lists developed for other regions and screening the scientific literature on plant flammability. Included in this list are plants adapted to grow *in* Oregon in either irrigated or non-irrigated landscapes. However, most of the plants on this list require some level of irrigation to survive during the dry summer months, particularly in central and eastern Oregon.

All of these plants are adaptable in Oregon unless specified by a C, E, S, or W. Plants indicated by these letters are suitable only for the regions listed below:

C = Central Oregon E = Eastern Oregon
S = Southern Oregon W = Western Oregon

Plant descriptions and availability

For a detailed description of the plants on this list, consult local nurseries or refer to the Sunset Western Garden Book and the A-Z Encyclopedia

Figure 2.

Purple Iceplant



of Garden Plants. These publications can be obtained at local bookstores or nurseries. If you are unable to find some of these plants locally, check out the Oregon Nurseryman's Association website for plant availability at:

<http://www.nurseryguide.com>

Scroll down to "Search For..." and click on Plants by Name. Type in the name of the plant you are interested in and the search will give you a list of nurseries that carry the plant.

Help us identify other fire-resistant plants

If you know of other fire-resistant plants suitable for Oregon, let us know. You can contact the authors by phone, letter, or email. We will then research your plant and, if it fits the criteria, we will add it to the list.

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