

## PROTECTING YOUR HOME FROM BRUSHFIRE

People who live in the brush-covered hills of California face one of the most dangerous and unique fire exposures of any modern community in the world. However, fire disasters can be avoided and prevented. Research by the Fire Retardant Plant Research Project, Los Angeles State and County Arboretum, has shown some plants to be relatively non-flammable: They withstand high temperatures for prolonged periods without igniting, and do not readily support open flames when ignited.

The following list of plants have proven to be fire retardant:

- **AEONIUM DECORUM** (no common name, a succulent): A neat, rounded mound of bronze-green leaves. Blooms with small pink flowers in the spring. It is sensitive to frost.
- **ARABIAN SCURFPEA** (*Psoralea bituminosa*): When well grown, resembles a large mounded clover bush. Has small purple flowers in the late spring. Becomes dormant during a drought period but rebounds well as conditions improve.
- **BLADDER POD** (*Isomeris arborea*): Is a bluish-green, erect shrubby form. Has interesting “bladder pods” for seed capsules. Grows up to 4 feet and has yellow flowers.
- **COTTONLEAF** (*Helichrysum petiolatum*): Forms neat rounded felty-gray mounds. The name refers to its soft silky twigs and foliage. Extreme care required when transplanting, but once established, persists and increases for years.
- **CREEPING SALTBUSH** (*Atriplex semibaccata*): Grows in low mats along coastal areas. Fine textured gray-green foliage becoming sufficiently compact to restrain weeds. Needs only minimum care.
- **DWARF COYOTE BUSH** (*Baccharis pilularis*): Forms smooth mats about 1 foot high on steep slopes. Small green leaves cover maze of horizontal stems spreading 4-6 feet. Needs minimum care but thrives best where watering is possible.
- **GREEN LAVENDER-COTTON** (*Santolina viridis*): Stays emerald green despite a hot sun and dry weather. Low-growing creeper. Has tendency to mound after number of years with no pruning. Good ground cover on slopes.
- **GUM ROCKROSE** (*Costus ladaniferus*): Narrow, glossy leaves stay green during hot, dry weather. In extreme drought, leaves reverse to show white underside.
- **HAIRY YERBA SANTA** (*Eriodictyon trichocalyz*): Glossy-leaved, inhabits well-drained slopes, road banks and rocky outcroppings forming open drifts about 2 feet

high. Extreme care needed when transplanting, but once established it persists and increases for years.

- **JADE PLANT** (*Crassula argentea*): Very easy to grow. An evergreen shrub with rounded, deep green leaves, producing clusters of small starry flowers during the first warm days of spring.
- **MEDITERRANEAN SALTBUSH** (*Atriplex halimus*): Silver-gray foliage tinged with rose during rapid early growth. Plant has a medium-fine texture. Lends a feeling of distance at the back of a planting, or in peripheral groups.
- **ROSE GERANIUM** (*Pelargonium graveolens*): Is a hardy, rugged drought resistant shrub with evergreen deeply lobed, distinctly-scented foliage. The flowers are small.
- **SMALL-LEAFED ICE PLANT** (*Mesembryanthemum*): The more commonly planted low-creeping, fleshy-leaved ice plants are generally shallow rooted, spring flowering and evergreen mat formers. Do well with occasional deep summer irrigation on gentle slopes and light soil. Avoid large-leaf varieties for slope planting.
- **WHITE ROCKROSE** (*Cistus hybridus*): A low, neat mounded bush. Has dark, richly colored and textured leaves and a myriad of small white spring flowers. With age, it grows down slopes and over banks.

Every homeowner can protect his property and his family by removing highly-flammable chaparral and replanting the cleared area with any of the fire retardant plants mentioned above.

Some additional tips on protecting your home from brush fires:

- Create a “defensible space” by removing all dry grass, brush, and dead leaves **at least 30 feet** from your home. Replace native plants with ornamental landscaping plants that are fire resistive.
- Space trees and shrubs at least 10 feet apart. Reduce the number of trees in heavily wooded areas.
- For trees taller than 18 feet, prune lower branches within six feet of the ground to keep ground fires from spreading into treetops.
- Stack firewood and scrap woodpiles at least 30 feet from any structure and clear away flammable vegetation that is within 10 feet of these woodpiles.
- Locate LPG tanks (butane and propane) at least 30 feet from any structure and surround them with 10 feet of clearance.
- Defensible space must be regularly maintained to be effective.