

Getting Rid of Fire Prone Plants

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

And Jessica Craven Goldstein, University of California Master Gardener

If you live near open space, you might consider ridding your landscape of certain fire prone plants. The juniper hedge serving as an icon of suburban living might now be regarded as a danger to neighbors.

FireSafe Marin, a non-profit organization based in Marin County, has developed a web site identifying primary targets for removal. That site <http://www.firesafemarin.org/plants/fire-prone> includes helpful photos and explanations. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), lists plants recommended for fire areas, at <http://www.readyforwildfire.org/Fire-Safe-Landscaping/>. Lori Lytle, of Ventura, also emailed me a link to Sunset Magazine's list of fire "safer" plants native to the west. It is <https://www.sunset.com/home-garden/plants/fire-resistant-plants>

Bougainvillea is one plant regarded as highly flammable. A hedge of over 100 feet on our property mostly burned in the Thomas Fire. Some grew back in the past year, and if we had waited long enough and worked hard enough, we could have trained the living tendrils and beautiful year-round bracts to fill in for the burned out sections of trunks, but bougainvillea is rated as "highly flammable." Instead, we are putting in hedge of Texas Sage/ Texas Ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*).

Plants inappropriate for a fire prone area next to open space may be suitable for areas closer to the city center, and sometimes you can accomplish this removal and reuse of your plants with minimal work. Sheri Clarke, of Ventura, emailed me a tip. "I was able to remove several large plants with two foot root balls by advertising them on Craigslist as 'free.' Truth? I could have charged money. I had a LOT of responses and several people begging to be the chosen one."

In the manner of Tom Sawyer enlisting the neighborhood to paint a picket fence, she told the "lucky" people she selected to bring their own shovel and wheelbarrow and any manpower required. Everything was gone by noon of the next day.

Nextdoor.com is another good web site for listing free items, but the listing areas for Nextdoor are smaller than Craigslist, so plants too risky for your landscape may also be too risky for those in your neighborhood who would see your Nextdoor posting. For listings, note the species offered, size, and of course you should include the facts about whether interested parties must be willing to dig out the plants.

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Some large trees are especially dangerous. For example, Black gum Eucalyptus can shoot flaming seed pods toward adjacent houses when it catches fire. Removing these trees most likely requires expensive professional assistance. However, for smaller jobs, you can rent a chipper and turn your discards into mulch. Keep the resulting mulch away from the walls of structures to avoid creating another fire danger.

Robert Chianese, of Ventura, emailed me to suggest this Eco-Tip and also recommend removing wild oats, fox tail, red brome and other fire spreading plants from adjacent open space, but notes permission should be asked of the land owner first. City planning departments can be helpful in identifying land owners.

For more gardening advice, contact the Ventura County Master Gardener helpline at the University of California Cooperative Extension office, (805) 645-1455 (Tuesday or Thursday 1-4 pm) or mgventura@ucdavis.edu