



## Hazard Brush Removal Guidelines

Getting rid of the flammable brush around your home is important to protect it from wildfire. But not all brush creates the same fire problem. This guide will show you the common types of brush that are the most important to remove. Just how far away to remove brush from your home depends on many factors. Contact your local Area Forester's office to get your questions answered. However, if you remove brush back at least 30-feet, you can't go wrong.

### **What to remove?**

The plants that keep their leaves all year around are usually the ones that are the most flammable. Trees and shrubs that drop their leaves in the fall usually do not pose a problem (their leaves do need to be raked away from structures, though!). The common plants that need to be cut and removed are:

#### Laurel (sometimes called ivy):



While not truly brush, any small **pine**, **juniper**, or **hemlock** trees are extremely flammable and should be removed.

#### Rhododendron:



#### Holly:



**How to remove brush?** If only a few stems need to be cut, a bow saw or hand saw should work just fine. However, if there is a lot to be cut, it's best to use a chain or brush saw. Chain and brush saws both require special training to safely use them.

**What to do with the brush?** If only a little brush has been cut, it might be the easiest to drag the pieces 100 or more feet away. If there is a lot to dispose of, chipping is usually best. Chips can be blown back into the woods or hauled away.

### **Recommended safety tips:**

- ▶ Know the safe way to operate and maintain the hand tools and power tools you will use.
- ▶ Eye injuries are common when working around brush—wear safety glasses.
- ▶ Wear a hardhat to protect yourself from falling branches and debris.
- ▶ Wear gloves to protect your hands.
- ▶ Watch out for stinging insects and poisonous snakes.
- ▶ Boots with good lugged soles are important, especially on steep slopes.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water to prevent heat sicknesses.
- ▶ Poison ivy is common. Best to wear long sleeves and wash with soap immediately after you quit working.
- ▶ Brush can be removed any time of year, but October- June is best due to safety concerns.

# Questions & Answers

## **Q: What is *Firewise* anyway?**

**A:** *Firewise* is the name given to a program developed to warn homeowners whose homes are located in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI; the area where homes intermix with forest) of the dangers wildfire poses to their homes. Under the program, WUI homeowners are encouraged to do simple maintenance to their home and surrounding landscape to lessen the threat that their home will be destroyed by wildfire. The *Firewise* concept is deeply ingrained in the National Fire Plan.

## **Q: What is the National Fire Plan?**

**A:** The National Fire Plan was developed by the federal government for mitigating the tragic losses to homes, property, and lives as a result of large uncontrolled wildfires. Initially, this plan was a response to wildfires and property losses in the western United States where the WUI is a major problem. But the plan was quickly expanded to cover all of the US as it became evident that WUI is an increasing problem even in the Southeast where more and more people are moving from the cities to rural areas. The Plan offers grant funding to the various fire agencies (federal and state forestry agencies, Volunteer Fire Departments), and communities that could potentially be impacted by a fire incident to equip and prepare themselves for the inevitable: wildfires will occur. The grants are 50/50 matching grants, but time invested in carrying out firewise practices can be substituted instead of dollars.

## **Q: How much is my time invested in *Firewise* projects worth?**

**A:** In 2005, the Federal Bureau of Labor valued volunteer time to be worth \$18.04 per hour.

## **Q: Does *Firewise* mean I have to cut everything around my home?**

**A:** Absolutely not. *Firewise* recommendations call for creation of a “defensible space” around your home. Defensible space means it is open enough and cleared of enough flammable plants

and debris to prevent the spread of fire to your home and that it allows ample room—a minimum of 30 feet on flat ground—for fire fighters to work around your home. (However, the steeper the slope, the more defensible space you will need). The most common examples of flammable plants are laurel (ivy), rhododendron, azalea, and any of the various pine and juniper species. It should be understood that a specimen or two of any of these types of plants located a safe distance from your home, so as not to carry the fire anywhere near your house, is acceptable. And every large pine tree around your house need not be cut down: simply reduce the number of those located within 100-feet of the house so that the tops of remaining pines are 20-feet apart. Be sure that the tree tops are not overhanging your house—especially near your chimney—and remove the lower limbs to at least 12 feet off the ground.

## **Q: What other types of maintenance does *Firewise* recommend I do around my home?**

**A:** *Firewise* also recommends homeowners clean their roofs and gutters of all leaves, needles, twigs or anything else that can burn. During a wildfire, sparks and embers can become airborne—carried by the wind—for up to several miles ahead of the fire. Should one of these embers land in a gutter or on a roof laden with debris, it can ignite causing fire to spread rapidly into the attic. Dead grasses, flowers, vines, etc. should be cleared well away from the house as well, since these can also ignite and spread to the foundation. Also remove leaves from underneath decks (it’s a good idea to screen underneath decks and porches) and keep any firewood well away from the house. The heat generated by a burning woodpile can be too intense for firefighters to get near your home. And be sure to keep propane tanks cleaned around and visible. The same goes for your address: make sure fire crews can locate your home in an emergency.

---

Following guidelines presented in this brochure does not guarantee that a wildfire will not cause damage to your home or property, but the significance of their impact will be lessened. All plants have the potential to burn. This brochure focuses on those native species that are the most flammable. You can obtain more information on *Firewise* practices and flammable plants by visiting [firewise.org](http://firewise.org).



*This publication was written by John Henderson, James Heaton, Leon Konz, and Jeff Piatt. 6/06*

This publication was produced in cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, Buffalo Duck Resource Conservation & Development Council, and USDA Forest Service.