

# Living on the Edge – The Wildland/Urban Interface



from the **TREE CITY USA®  
BULLETIN**

*With light breezes in the treetops or a relaxing vista of chaparral, scrub oak, or palmetto, life can be good where nature meets the city. While this is truly a place close to nature, it is not quite rural and not urban. When people choose to live there, it presents important issues for both landowners and resource managers.*

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Residences at the edge of the city present a challenge to landowners and public officials, including urban foresters. Forethought and cooperation are needed for safety and environmental protection.

## YOU WILL FIND IN THIS ISSUE:

- The role of herbaceous perennials, ground covers, and grasses to make property fire-resistant
- Suggestions for public policies
- Examples of communities that have taken preventive action
- And much more

## Living With Fire

Each year hundreds of homes in the wildland/urban interface are destroyed by fire and lives are tragically lost. An essential first step to harmonious living is to recognize that fire has always been a natural part of the wild environment. With the arrival of human habitation, it requires carefully planned efforts to live there safely.

## Herbaceous Perennials

- Separate flower beds with walkways, walls, or mowed grass.
- Select succulent plants, ideally low-growing species.
- Keep plants watered, and weed out dead material regularly.
- Avoid planting directly next to the house.

## Grasses

- Select low-growing grasses suitable for your area.
- Keep watered and mowed.
- Consider grasses such as buffalograss that require the least water.
- Grass is especially appropriate near buildings.

## Trees

- Near the house, select hardwoods (maples, buckeyes, hickories, catalpa, hackberry, honeylocust, oaks, etc.) instead of conifers.
- Crowns should be at least 10 feet from structures.
- Prune limbs 8 to 15 feet above the ground.
- Rake up fallen leaves.
- At least 30 to 70 feet from the house, orchards are appropriate; forest trees are generally safe if 200 feet from the house, thinned, and pruned.

## Ground Covers

- Low-growing, spreading, and succulent groundcovers are very effective firewise plants.
- Maintain through watering, trimming, and removing dead material.

## Avoid

- Conifers, including junipers, pines, spruces, and others commonly used against the foundation of houses.
- Any other resinous tree or smaller plants, especially near the house.
- Dense plantings of any shrub.
- Stacking firewood within 30 to 100 feet from the house.



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