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This editorial was written by Julie Monk, Vice President of Natures Enhancement Inc. for FireSafe Montana's Enough is Enough campaign. The Enough is Enough campaign focuses on the many issues of wildland fire in the urban interface. For more Enough is Enough Editorials go to firesafemt.org.

FIREWISE LANDSCAPING, PLANNING NOW FOR THE 2014 FIRE SEASON.

While most homeowners are aware of planning for fire prevention when building or purchasing a home, there is another important aspect that should be considered. This is the outside landscaping.

Beautiful landscapes can be created that also limit the damage from fires. One way to do this is to incorporate hardscapes. These are the hard structures that surround the outside of a home. Many elegant patios, walkways, walls, and borders can be constructed to add both visual appeal and increase the outdoor living space of your home. All of these landscape creations have very low percentage of burning. Hardscapes also help to prevent the spread of fires to other parts of your property and home because they are made out of fire blocking materials such as natural rock, cement, and concrete. If any of your hardscapes include barbeques or fire pits, make sure they have a proper cover on them to prevent free flowing embers.

Native plants also have many uses in developing a firewise landscape. Since they are indigenous to the region, they thrive in naturally occurring outside elements. Weather conditions, insects, and diseases usually have minimal negative effects on native plants. Healthy plants tend to be more vigorous in their ability to ward off fires, than plants that are already weak and dry. When choosing which plants to place at a property, there are some necessary characteristics to consider. These include such items as; how much water the plant requires to stay healthy, how fast and dense the plant grows, and how much leaf, needle, and plant debris will be created. It is best to choose plants that require less water, have a more open structure, and shed minimal debris that could add more fuel to the fires.

After hardscapes and native plants are installed, it is important to properly maintain your landscape. When possible, keep an area around your home (most commonly suggested is 100 feet), free of any items. Early Spring, is a good time for pruning, while plants are dormant before they start opening their buds and pushing new growth. In Summer, make sure any lawn and planted areas receive proper additional water, as this time of year tends to be dry. Spring and Fall are the best time for doing more planting, as the roots will continue to grow even as the above ground plant growth is slow. Plants are able to take advantage of the extra moisture the weather conditions usually bring. Just be sure to rake and remove any fallen leaves, needles, and overall debris.

Natures Enhancement has chosen to partner with FireSafe Montana and help spread the firewise/firesafe message simply because "we care". It is upsetting when a beautiful landscape is burned to the ground. This affects values of homes, use of outdoor living space, and enjoyment by homeowners and other wildlife habitat that are dependent upon safe landscapes to survive.

With proper preparation though FireSafe Montana and its partners, we can all help to alleviate fire destruction to homes and properties.

Pictures shown highlight some of the firewise concepts discussed in this article. Additional information including a list of available native plants and more landscape design concepts can be found at natureenhancementinc.com. More information on the Enough is Enough campaign and more resources to help get you ready for the fire season go to firesafemt.org.

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