

Five Steps to Creating an Effective Defensible Space

Defensible space is the area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been managed to reduce the wildfire threat, which allows firefighters to safely defend the house or could even improve the likelihood of the home surviving without assistance. Here is an overview of the five steps to help you create an effective defensible space. For more detailed information, review the defensible space section of *Fire Adapted Communities - The Next Step in Wildfire Preparedness*.



Step One

The recommended distance varies depending on the dominant vegetation surrounding the home and steepness of slope. Use the chart below to determine the right amount needed for your home. Work with your neighbors when the distance exceeds your property line.



Step Three

Thin dense shrub stands to create more space between them. Depending on the slope of your terrain, shrubs or small clumps of shrubs should be separated from one another by at least twice the height of the average shrub. More distance is needed on steeper slopes. For Jeffrey Pine and White Fir trees, create a separation between canopies of at least 10 feet, increasing that distance on steeper slopes.

RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE DISTANCE			
	Flat To Gently Sloping 0-20%	Moderately Steep 21-40%	Very Steep +40%
Grass Dry grass and weeds	100 feet	100 feet	100 feet
Shrubs and Woodland Sagebrush, manzanita and mountain mahogany	100 feet	200 feet	200 feet
Forest Trees Fir and pine. If there's a substantial shrub understory, use those values stated above.	100 feet	100 feet	200 feet



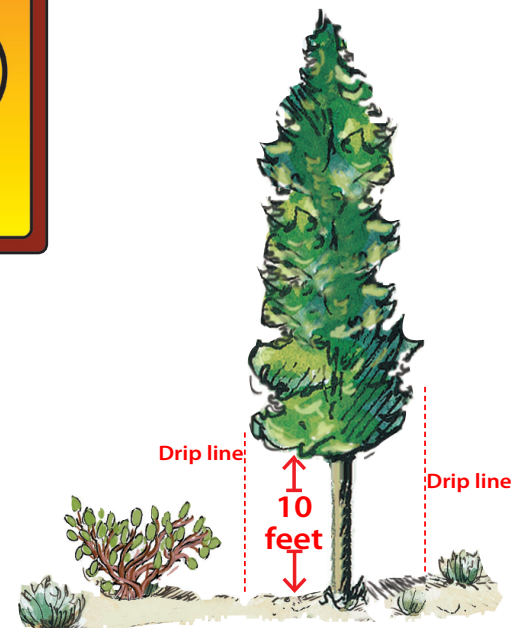
Step Two

Within your defensible space, remove all dead vegetation, including shrubs, fallen branches, grass, weeds and flowers, as well as dead or dying standing trees or recently fallen trees. Fallen needles and leaves require special consideration:

- **Within 5 feet** of the house, remove routinely.
- From **5 feet to 30 feet** of the house, remove every spring by May 1. Needles and leaves that fall after the removal period can accumulate on the ground as long as they do not create a fire hazard.
- **More than 30 feet** from the house, do not allow fallen needles and leaves to exceed a depth of 3 inches.



Step Four



Ladder fuels are vegetation that can help the fire climb up from low-growing plants to adjacent taller shrubs and trees. Remove shrubs and trees growing under the drip line of trees and remove low-hanging branches not to exceed the bottom 1/3 of the tree's height.



Step Five

This area is often the residential landscape that includes ornamental plants and irrigation, and is maintained regularly. Keep it lean, clean and green to eliminate easily ignitable fuels near the house and prevent ignition from embers during a wildfire.

Noncombustible Area Tips to Prevent Ember Ignition

The area immediately adjacent to a house is of critical importance to house survival during a wildfire. **From 0 to 5 feet from your house, create a non-combustible area:**

- Keep it free of all flammable vegetation, including shrubs, fallen needles, and firewood.
- Do not use bark or wood mulches, or landscape timbers or board.
- Use herbaceous or deciduous plants that are low-growing, irrigated, and recommended for the Lake Tahoe Basin, such as lawn, clover, and flowers.

Residential Landscape Area Tips

From 5 to 30 feet from your house:

- Remove dead or dried grass, flowers, branches, shrubs, trees and firewood.
- Remove fallen needles and leave every spring by May 1.
- Substantially reduce native shrubs, leaving only healthy individual specimens or small groups.
- Low-growing native shrubs, such as pinemat manzanita and Mahala mat, can be retained.

Maintenance

Maintaining a defensible space is an ongoing activity. Each Spring, re-evaluate your defensible space using the previous five steps and implement the necessary recommendations.



The Tahoe Fire & Fuels Team is a group of dedicated professionals committed to protecting life, property and the environment at Lake Tahoe through proper management of the forests to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, to protect communities, and safeguard the exceptional natural resources of Lake Tahoe.