



Don't let an overgrown driveway
block the way for rescuers.

BE FIREWISE PART 3

Is Your Landscape Fire Resistant?

Expect the Unexpected

Everyone loves a forest. Some love it so much they choose to live within it. If this has been your choice, learning to co-habitate with the wildland is the only wise thing to do. Understanding that fire is a natural and vital part of a forest's ecosystem is the first step in co-habitation.

Be proactive to prevent disaster. It will not harm a forest's natural balance if you properly thin the undergrowth, properly prune the treetops and selectively remove trees. Planning, preparing and implementing these steps can save lives from an unexpected fire, as well as create a beautiful landscape for your home while promoting a healthy natural ecosystem.

If you need personal advice to help you determine the best plan for your property, contact one of the fire experts on page 2.

Living in Iowa's beautiful countryside can be both exciting and relaxing. The changing seasons with wildlife at your backdoor can be breathtaking. Then again, a wildfire at your backdoor can also be "breathtaking" but not in the same way. This is not the side of nature you want to experience unprepared.

The Iowa DNR is again reminding rural landowners to be "firewise" by using rural wisdom to keep your property fire resistant. Be aware that fires in rural and forested areas are hard to control and cannot be handled in the same manner as city fires. Usually rural homes are many miles from a fire station. In many rural fire departments there are fewer firefighters available than in city fire departments, and usually these firefighters are volunteers. Volunteer firefighters leave their jobs to respond to a fire, this adds extra reaction time to the emergency call, allowing the fire to spread. Properties that have not been maintained properly complicate the hazard. The solution to this dilemma is in your hands, literally. When you take the time and energy to make your property fire-resistant, you reduce the risk of a fire starting or one spreading to your home. Your preparation may not only save your property and family, but your community as well.

Making your surroundings fire safe does not have to cost money, just a small investment of time. The goal is to limit flammable vegetation and materials surrounding the home, and to have space between individual and/or groups of plants and trees. Get some friends and neighbors together and help each other make improvements. Everyone has something at stake and it will make the work easy and enjoyable.

In "Be Firewise Part 2, Wildland/Urban Landscape" steps were given to help you prepare your property and buildings against an unexpected wildfire. By now you should be making strides in preparing your property. Please use the following checklist to reassess your property's needs. For more details, visit the Iowa DNR website, www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/fire/firewise.html, or contact Iowa DNR Wildland Fire Supervisor, Gail Kantak, Gail.Kantak@dnr.iowa.gov.

1. The buildings and the 30 foot zone surrounding the house:

- Remove all dead leaves, pine needles, and stems from the landscape, gutters, and under the deck.

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- Remove limbs that hang over the house – they are flammable and they drop debris which can easily catch a spark.
- Install metal screens on all chimney, attic, fascia, and foundation openings to prevent embers entering the building.
- Move any stacked firewood or propane tanks to at least 100 feet from the house.
- Landscape with materials that are nonflammable, such as rock, pavers, annuals, high-moisture perennials.
- Box in the undersides of overhangs, bay windows, decks, and balconies with fire-resistant materials.
- Make sure the house numbers are at least 4 inches tall and easily visible.
- Attach a hose rack with a 100' hose to the house; attach the hose to an outside faucet.
- Carefully space low-growing plants or trim and shape overgrown plants.
- Mow and trim the lawn regularly.
- Keep wood mulch moist.
- Prune trees so that the lowest limbs are at least 6 to 10 feet above ground.
- Prune branches overhanging the driveway to a 14 foot overhead clearance.
- Plan and practice an escape route with your family and pets.
- Place fire extinguishers in the kitchen, garage, and machine sheds; keep them properly maintained.

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2. Move to the next zone, 30 to 100 feet from your home.

- Organize trees into clusters of two or three, spacing the clusters 30 feet apart; if there are individual trees space them 20 feet apart. Try to mix deciduous and evergreen trees.
- Again, trim tree branches 6 to 10 feet above ground and remove woody debris.
- Do not use a burn barrel for trash or yard debris. Start a compost pile instead.
- Create firebreaks such as driveways, gravel walkways, and open lawns.
- Make sure driveways are at least 12 feet wide for emergency vehicles; driveways with sharp curves need to be 20 feet wide.

3. Now move to the zone that is 100 to 200 feet from the home.

- Thin out the vegetation, but not as thin as in the 30 to 100 foot zone. Share the cost of a wood chipper with neighbors and chip your tree trimmings. Use the chips as mulch.
- Remove heavy accumulations of woody debris such as wood piles or brush piles.
- Remove any evergreen seedlings growing among taller trees; they act as ladders for a fire to climb to the treetops.
- Strategically prune tall trees so the treetops are not touching.
- If the driveway is longer than 150 feet, provide a turn-around for emergency vehicles.
- Install visible house numbers and/or 911 address at the entrance of the driveway using nonflammable building materials.
- For easy visibility, keep vegetation trimmed around the entrance to your property.

Do not let an unexpected wildfire destroy your reason for living in the country. Be rural wise. Be firewise. Take the time and effort to make your property safe so that you can relax and enjoy the breathtaking beautiful Iowa landscape. Your investment is in your hands.

