

Managing vegetation around your home



Bushfires are survivable

In Victoria, bushfires are inevitable. The key to surviving a bushfire is to be self-reliant and well prepared by having a plan that suits the needs of your household. A good plan will consider the preparations of your home and property and what you will do in the event of a fire.

Get as much information as you can about the bushfire risk in your area. Consider fire safety as well as your personal preferences and values when developing your plan.

House survival during bushfires

Houses burn down during bushfires mainly because of sparks and embers. Sparks and embers may land before the main fire reaches your home and well after the fire has passed. If embers land in places where they can easily ignite, such as on doormats or firewood stacks, they may cause a new fire ('spot fire'). There are a number of things you can do to improve the chances of your home surviving a bushfire:

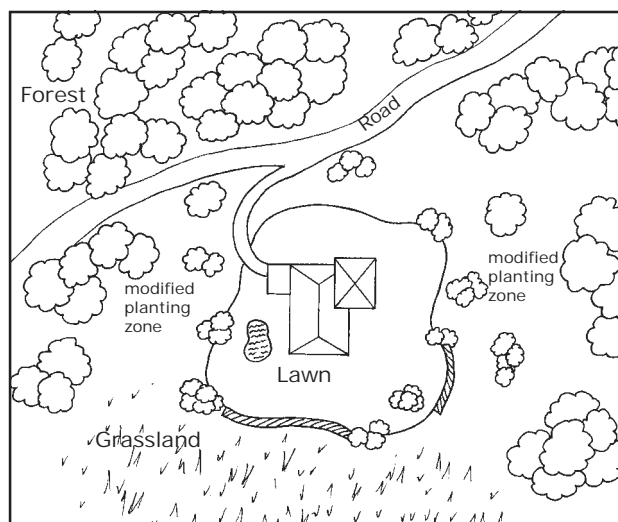
- have people at your home to put out sparks and embers;
- design and construct your home appropriately; and
- manage the vegetation around your home.

The information in this brochure only focuses on managing the vegetation (trees, shrubs and grasses) around your home.

Property Design

The path that a fire will take depends on how the fuel is arranged. Fire does not spread easily over low-fuel areas. Breaking up areas of fuel can slow the spread and speed of a fire and can also reduce its heat.

- Consider your home's location in relation to prevailing winds, as this indicates the most likely direction from which a bushfire may come.
- Ensure good access to water for firefighting.
- Graded or ploughed breaks can encourage weeds and cause soil erosion. Consider other ways of creating low-fuel areas, such as grazing, slashing or planned burning.
- Plants that retain or accumulate dead leaves and twigs can burn more easily. But more importantly, they can also assist the spread of fire from the ground into the trees. Limit the ability of fire to spread upward by pruning shrubs and trees.

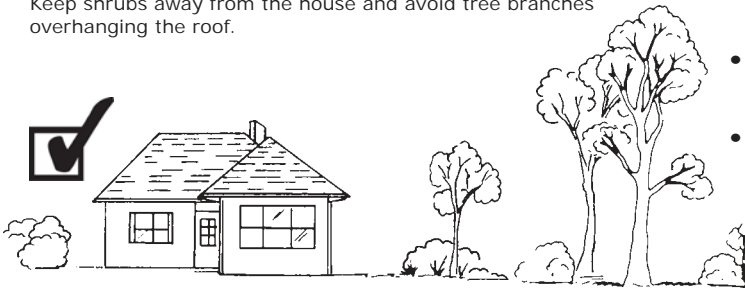


Low fuel areas such as driveways, pools, green lawns, cultivated soil or gravelled areas, or mown or grazed paddocks can help protect your house.

Contact your local council before lopping or removing any plants as you may require a permit.



Keep shrubs away from the house and avoid tree branches overhanging the roof.



Reduce fine fuels

All plants provide fuel for a bushfire. However, it is the fine fuels (those less than a finger's width) that contribute most to the heat and speed of a fire. Fine fuels include dry grass, leaves, twigs and loose bark but does not include larger logs or branches. Minimising fine fuels reduces the heat of a fire and its ability to spread across the ground and up into the tree-tops. Reducing fine fuels can also create a space in which to defend your home from embers.

- Weeds often contribute to high fuel loads. Give priority to removing these.
- Fine fuels may be reduced around the house by mowing, raking or slashing.
- Reduce accumulated debris such as loose flaky bark, dead branches, leaves or pine needles from within the branches of shrubs around your house. Be mindful not to damage the tree under the bark.

Look after your environment

- Keeping plants moist reduces the chance of them burning. Plants can be kept moist using mulch, pebbles or rocks. If using mulch, keep it wetted down or covered with soil or sand during the fire season. Contain your mulch to small areas, concentrating on individual plants and their roots.
- Hollow logs or trees are important habitat for many species. Fires in hollow trees can also create embers that may be carried by the wind to create new spot fires. So plan your fuel reduction to minimise the chance of hollow logs or trees catching fire.
- Protecting streamside vegetation and wetlands helps to prevent sedimentation and protect habitat. These sites may be damp and less fire-prone and may not present a hazard. If fuel levels in these areas are of concern, you may be able to isolate these areas from assets that you are aiming to protect.
- Design new plantings with fire protection in mind. Consider the location and arrangement of the planting. Be mindful that plantings may take several years to establish, so plan for follow up weed control.
- Learn more about the fire needs of your vegetation. A lot of Victorian vegetation has evolved with fire. By burning in appropriate cycles, you can obtain both fuel reduction and ecological benefits. Contact your local Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Office for more information.



Prune so that the tops of the shrubs are well away from the lower branches of trees.

Plant selection

Different plants burn differently. This is influenced by a number of features, which are also influenced by how old the plant is, the environment it is growing in (including the season) and how it is looked after (for example, if it is well-watered).

Avoid having plants near your home that may burn more easily. Such plants include those that:

- accumulate and/or create lots of dry, dead debris during the fire season;
- have loose flaky bark;
- have masses of very fine leaves; and
- have very low moisture content.

Don't rely on plants being 'fire retardant'

While some plants may not burn in low to moderately intense fires, **all plants can burn in high intensity fires** (those fires when you and your home are most at risk).

You should not rely on published lists of 'fire retardant' or 'hard to burn' plant species. Many of these lists are out of date and advocate plants that may have little impact on the safety of your home during a bushfire. Some of these plants are also weeds. Your local council can provide information to help you select plants that are suitable for your local environment.

For more information

Phone Community Safety at your local CFA Area Office www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Contact your local DSE Office www.dse.vic.gov.au Visit your local council's website

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