

# PLANNING A GARDEN

Before designing a garden, there are a number of factors to consider. Reducing bushfire risk to any house is most effective when considered early in the planning process.

## NEW HOUSES

### Property layout

Think strategically about where the house is located and how the garden around it is designed. That way, it is possible to achieve multiple outcomes – bushfire safety considerations are incorporated but are not the only function of the garden.

Find out what building and planning regulations apply to the property. Visit [land.vic.gov.au](http://land.vic.gov.au) or talk to the local council. Depending on the bushfire risk, these regulations may influence:

- where the house can be built
- the construction level required
- how to manage the vegetation within the property.

Information in this section is based on the bushfire protection requirements for building in high bushfire risk areas.

The requirements are fully set out in Planning Schemes at Clause 52.47 Bushfire Protection: Planning Requirements (see Further Resources) but are summarised below.

Understanding how these factors influence bushfire can avoid unnecessarily increasing the risk within properties.

### Bushfire protection requirements

#### SITING AND DESIGN

One of the most effective ways to reduce bushfire risk is the appropriate location of a house within a property. Features of the topography can be used to help minimise bushfire spreading into and within the property. Houses should be located away from unmanaged vegetation, steep slopes, saddles or narrow ridge tops. They should ideally be located close to public roads and accessways.

Look at the landscape in and around the property:

- What is the bushfire risk from the surrounding area?
- Is there existing vegetation within or close to the property that will pose a significant bushfire hazard?

Anywhere that embers can lodge or enter a house can start a fire.

There are areas of a house that contribute more to overall bushfire risk than others. These include decks, windows, doors and roof areas. Complex designs that may create nooks and crannies allow dead plant material and embers to drop and accumulate.

#### DEFENDABLE SPACE

Defendable space is an area of land around a building where vegetation is modified and managed to reduce the effects of flame contact and radiant heat associated with bushfire. It breaks up continuity and reduces the amount of fuel available to a bushfire.

It is one of the most important aspects of preparing properties for bushfire. This is because defendable space separates the bushfire hazard and the house. The greater the separation from the bushfire hazard, the lower the risk.

Defendable space can prevent direct flame contact and minimise the effects of radiant heat on the house. This reduces the risk of house loss during a bushfire, regardless of active defence.

Defendable space:

- comprises an inner and outer zone with different vegetation management requirements
- needs careful garden design that considers the location of all flammable objects
- requires regular maintenance that should be included as part of every Bushfire Survival Plan.

Requirements for defendable space will vary depending on the type of development and the level of bushfire risk to a property. Section 4 provides further detail about defendable space requirements.



Complex house designs allow dead plant material and embers to accumulate.

## CONSTRUCTION

The way a building is constructed can help reduce the risk of house loss via radiant heat and ember attack.

Construction standards are linked to defensible space. The greater the area of defensible space, the lower the construction requirement under Australian Standard AS3959-2009: Construction of Buildings in Bushfire-prone Areas.

A bushfire site assessment is required to determine the construction standard that will apply to any house. Details for undertaking a bushfire site assessment in the Bushfire Management Overlay can be found in Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) *Practice Note 65: Bushfire Management Overlay and Bushfire Protection: Planning Requirements* (see Further Resources).

## PROVISION OF SERVICES

Water is essential for firefighting.

The amount and reliability of water is critical for all properties and must be considered in relation to the bushfire risk.

In all areas the water supply must have appropriate pressure, access and fittings. In the Bushfire Management Overlay, a water supply must be provided.

Access is just as important as it provides a way for residents to get out and the fire services to get in. Roads must be capable of accommodating fire trucks and will require specific construction standards, as well as width and clearance, depending on the property.

For minimum water supply and access requirements that apply to a property in the Bushfire Management Overlay, refer to *CFA Fire Service Guideline: Land Use Planning 0002: Requirements for Water Supply and access in a Bushfire Management Overlay* (see Further Resources).

## HOME BUSHFIRE ADVICE SERVICE

Book a free Home Bushfire Advice visit for help assessing bushfire risk at a particular property.

To book an appointment, complete the online form on the CFA website. One of CFA's trained Fire Safety Officers will provide tailored advice, delivered on the property.

Self assessment of bushfire risk can be undertaken by using the Online Household Bushfire Self-Assessment Tool at [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)



Paths provide separation between garden beds.



Water feature



Non-flammable outdoor furniture



Water feature

## LANDSCAPING

Once the layout of the property is decided there are some decisions to make about what type of garden will be planted.

Gardening is a personal activity and when planning any garden there are many considerations apart from bushfire.

While this publication focuses on gardening to reduce bushfire risk, any garden must meet the needs of those that are using and maintaining it. If a garden suits the needs of residents it is more likely to be maintained from year to year.

There are many different styles of gardening. Some focus on native vegetation, productive or water-sensitive design.

Whatever style is chosen the garden must be appropriate to the local area. Seek advice from the local council (see Further Resources) about species that are suited to a particular location. This will help to avoid planting environmental weeds or invasive plants.

Consider bushfire risk early in the garden planning process. By incorporating the design principles in Section 4, costs can be minimised and bushfire mitigation will complement other functions of the garden.

When planning a garden some things to consider include:

- budget
- the local growing conditions that may affect plant selection
- ongoing maintenance requirements
- function and style of the garden.

Think about how the features below are incorporated into the overall garden design as they may reduce the spread of fire by providing separation between the house and bushfire hazards. For example:

- paths
- pools or water features
- tennis courts
- vegetable gardens.

## EXISTING HOUSES

The information outlined on page 6 about defensible space and landscaping is relevant to planning a garden for existing houses.

However, there are also some specific points that need consideration.

### CONSTRUCTION

The resilience of existing houses can be improved by retrofitting some building elements.

More advice can be obtained from *A guide to retrofit your home for better protection from a bushfire* (see Further Resources).

### PROVISION OF SERVICES

In high bushfire risk areas, it is recommended that a dedicated water supply is installed for firefighting purposes. Where possible, access should meet the requirements as outlined for new houses.

## RULES FOR VEGETATION CLEARANCE AROUND EXISTING HOUSES

Throughout Victoria there are restrictions for vegetation clearance on private property. These are contained in the planning scheme of each municipality. In many cases, a planning permit is required to remove vegetation.

In areas where bushfire is a risk, there are particular circumstances where a permit is not required for vegetation removal around existing houses.

For example, the Victoria Planning Provisions Clause 52.17 Native Vegetation outline exemptions that apply for removing, destroying or lopping native vegetation for fire protection. Clause 52.48 Bushfire Protection: Exemptions refers to the 10/30 and 10/50 rules.

To find out if these exemptions apply to a particular council, refer to the relevant planning scheme (see Further Resources).

### The 10/30 rule

The 10/30 rule applies to a building used for accommodation that was:

- constructed before 10 September 2009 or approved by a planning or building permit issued before 10 September 2009.

It allows landowners to:

- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation within 10 metres of an existing building used for accommodation.
- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation, except for trees within 30 metres of an existing building used for accommodation.
- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation for a combined maximum width of 4 metres either side of an existing fence on a boundary. The fence must be between properties of different ownership and have been constructed before 10 September 2009.

### The 10/50 rule

The 10/50 rule applies only to land in the Bushfire Management Overlay. It applies to a building used for accommodation that was:

- constructed before 10 September 2009 or lawfully erected before 18 November 2011 without the need for a planning permit
- approved by a planning or building permit before 10 September 2009 and erected before 18 November 2011
- approved by a building permit before 10 September 2009 and erected before 18 November 2011.

The 10/50 rule allows landowners to:

- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation within 10 metres of an existing building used for accommodation.
- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation, except trees, within 50 metres of an existing building used for accommodation.
- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation for a combined maximum width of 4 metres either side of an existing fence on a boundary between properties. The fence must be between properties of different ownership and have been constructed before 10 September 2009.

### IMPORTANT

In high bushfire risk areas properties may need a greater amount of defensible space. Clearance over the distances stipulated in the 10/30 and 10/50 rules require a planning permit.