

## How to Protect Your Home from a Wildfire

Last week I discussed the drought we are in. Drought is not only stressful for our vegetation, but makes us all more susceptible to wildfires.

We have all heard the reports and seen the pictures of the many wildfires burning throughout the state. Many homes have been lost. Fire officials frequently point to situations where a home has been lost, but the home next to it is untouched. Sometimes it is just luck that protected one home and not the other, but often it has to do with the surviving home being better prepared to withstand a wildfire.

If you live on the edge of the city, in the country, or anywhere surrounded by, adjacent to, or within a half mile of a natural area, your home could be involved in a wildfire. What you do now, to anticipate and to prepare for such an eventuality, can make all the difference in whether your home, and your family, survive a wildfire.

People often think if they have a wildfire near them, the fire department will take care of it. Not necessarily. Not if every fireman and fire truck have been out all night fighting a wildfire and trying to defend more homes than there are defenders. Under low humidity and high wind conditions, wildfires move too fast and burn too intensely to be contained. Your fate is in your hands.

There are two levels of wildfire preparedness. What you can do to make your home less likely to catch fire, now before any wildfire threatens, and what you can do when a wildfire is threatening.

To help homeowners prepare their homes to survive a fire, the Texas Forest Service has instituted programs to educate landowners on what they can do. Go to [www.firewise.org/usa](http://www.firewise.org/usa) to access some of this information, or to my website, [www.hillcountrynaturalist.org](http://www.hillcountrynaturalist.org) and open the HC Ecology page.

Basically, what you need to do is to walk around your house and think about how fire from the surrounding pasture/woodland might catch your house on fire. The idea is expressed as a fire ladder. For example, if a grass/brush fire were to catch your wooden privacy fence on fire and it in turn burned up to your wooden deck and the deck caught the soffit area of your roof on fire, the house would likely be lost. You need to make sure there is some nonflammable break between native vegetation and your house, garage, deck, etc., so that if there is a wildfire, it won't get to your home.

Homes located on hills above steep cedar-covered slopes, homes with raised wooden decks open underneath or homes open underneath are especially susceptible. Homes with wood roofing or siding, single-pane windows, open soffits, etc., are also at greater

risk. Providing non-flammable barriers, such as sidewalks, gravel paths, and low-growing green vegetation around the house help keep a wildfire away.

But it is a bit more complicated than just the above, because an intense wildfire can send burning embers flying a half mile or more and if they land on your roof, on your porch, against a fence, etc., your home could still be in danger. You can't do a really good job of preparing your home to survive a wildfire until you learn the many ways homes can be at risk, and how to mitigate these risks. The above websites can lead you to much of that information.

The second part of what you need to do is to formulate a plan of what to do if a wildfire is moving toward your home. You need to have thought about that situation in advance and made a plan that everyone in the household understands.

There is a program initiated by the International Fire Chiefs Association called "Ready Set Go" which outlines the steps each homeowner should take before any fire is approaching. It prepares the residents so that if such a situation should arise, everyone in the home can react appropriately, ready the home for evacuation and leave early enough to escape danger. For more information, go to [www.wildlandfireRSG.org](http://www.wildlandfireRSG.org), and/or, better, [http://www.montecitofire.com/resources/pdf/Public\\_Education/ReadySetGoMFD2Single.pdf](http://www.montecitofire.com/resources/pdf/Public_Education/ReadySetGoMFD2Single.pdf)

One thing I can't emphasize enough. Many folks think that if a fire should approach, they would stay and defend their home. That is exactly what most people who have died in these fires thought. Don't even think about defending your home with a garden hose! Get out!

Even if it rained yesterday, think about this and plan now. Until next time...

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