



Berkeley Fire Department

FireSafe Berkeley Landscape Guide

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Example of Well-Designed Zone 1 Vegetation

Introduction

In 2025, the Berkeley City Council adopted new wildfire safety requirements for specific high-risk areas of the city. These measures are designed to reduce the likelihood that homes ignite when a wildfire moves into Berkeley.

Wildfire science indicates that most structure loss occurs when wind-driven embers ignite vegetation or debris near a home, rather than from direct flame contact. When implemented properly, defensible space measures significantly reduce this risk.

Defensible space requirements are part of [Berkeley's EMBER ordinance](#), **which took effect on January 1, 2026**. Although these standards currently apply only in the Grizzly Peak and Panoramic Mitigation Areas, the State may extend similar requirements to additional areas in the future. Defensible space is also a smart choice for any property owner concerned about wildfire risk, regardless of location.



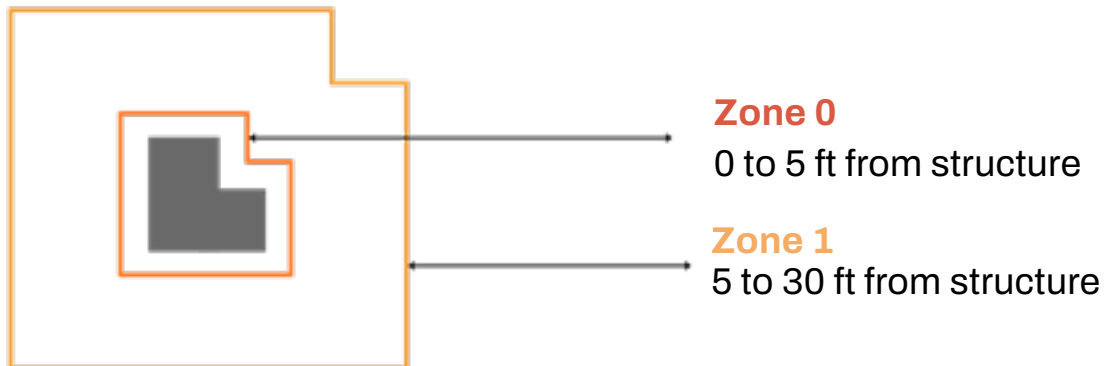
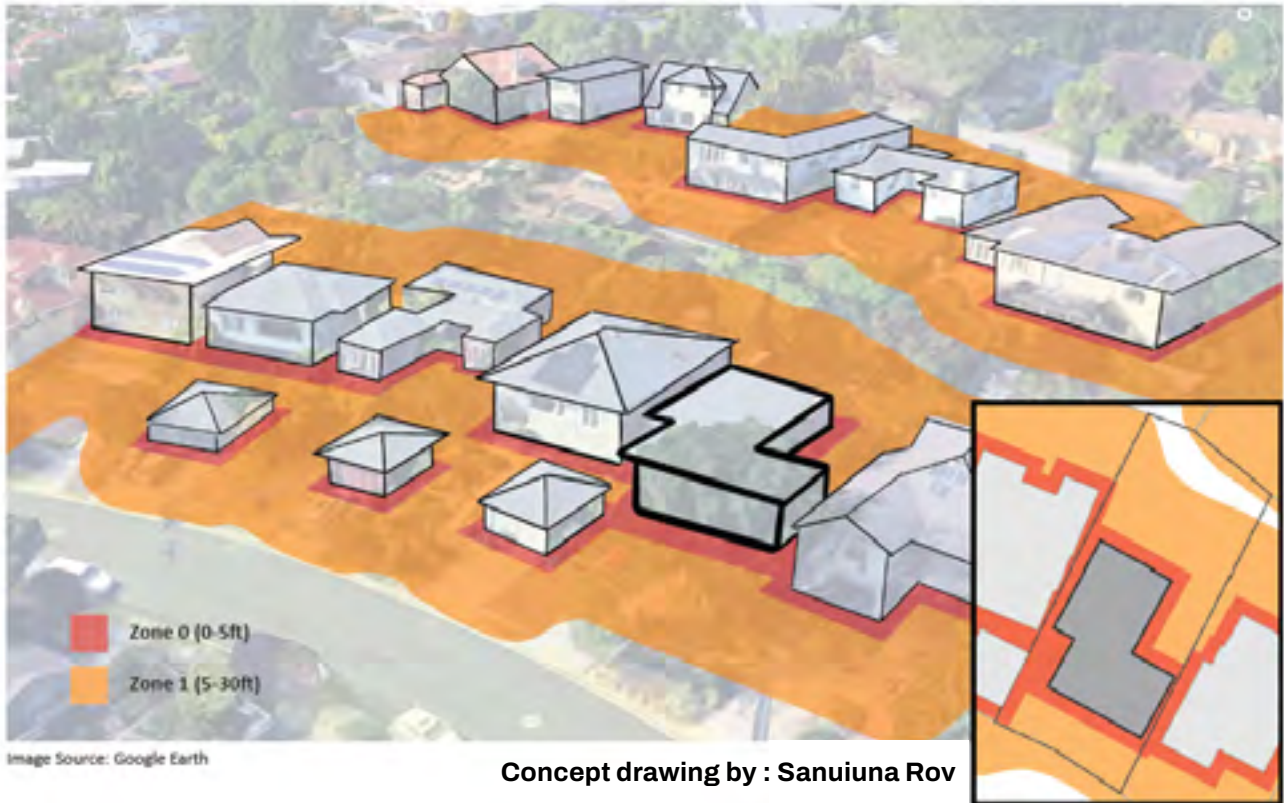
Purpose of This Guide

This guide provides clear, practical guidance on vegetation management and creating defensible space, while supporting a range of landscaping preferences with practical and beautiful suggestions.

Some properties are required to comply with legally enforced vegetation management standards; for all others, these guidelines serve as recommendations to support community-wide wildfire risk reduction. No matter where you are at, the fire department is here to help you start, and help you find solutions.

These management practices are grouped into three zones around a structure: Zone 0, Zone 1, and Zone 2

Block Perspective - Zone 0 and Zone 1



A Shared Community Approach

Actions taken on a single property reduce risk for that specific structure, but wildfire risk reduction is most effective when adjacent homes are addressed together, as an entire neighborhood.

When structures are close together—as they are in most of Berkeley—one ignited home can quickly threaten neighboring homes.

Protecting entire neighborhoods depends on shared effort by neighbors and is supported by the City of Berkeley and the Fire Department.

Why Focus on These Areas

Berkeley includes densely developed hillside neighborhoods of older homes that border open space and regional parkland and face elevated wildfire risk. Steep slopes, dense vegetation, seasonal winds, and limited spacing between structures built before the 2008 codes contribute to this risk.

Because of these local conditions, state law allows communities to adopt stricter wildfire standards. Berkeley has done this through the EMBER ordinance, which adds tailored requirements for defensible space, vegetation management, and building hardening in high-risk neighborhoods.

Wildfire will threaten these areas first before moving down the hills. Creating defensible space around the structures in these neighborhoods will help slow the spread of ignitions, allowing firefighters from around the region time to assemble and engage in the fight before entire neighborhoods are lost.



Zone 0 Garden Example: Use non-combustible, easily movable containers to add life without increasing risk

What is Zone 0

Zone 0 is the area from zero to five feet around structures, including homes, decks, fences, sheds, and garages.

This area is critical because most homes ignite from embers that land in this zone rather than from direct flame contact with a fire; the source of those embers is often a fire burning far from the home. But Zone 0 is also the last line of defense from any heat and flames of vegetation burning near the home.

The Berkeley Wildland Urban Interface Code requires that the first five feet from a structure be free of combustible material. **Zone 0 code requirements apply to properties within the Grizzly Peak Mitigation Area and the Panoramic Hills Mitigation Area.** Additional information is available at BerkeleyFireSafe.org.



Designated Fire Areas

- 1 Grizzly Peak Mitigation Area
- 2 Panoramic Hills Mitigation Area
- 3 Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone
- 4 High Fire Hazard Severity Zone
- 5 Flatlands Mitigation Area

Locate Your Fire Area

Visit BerkeleyFireSafe.org and enter your address to identify your designated fire area and view instructional videos on how to achieve defensible space.





Zone 0 Design Ideas

Designing Zone 0 (0-5 Feet)

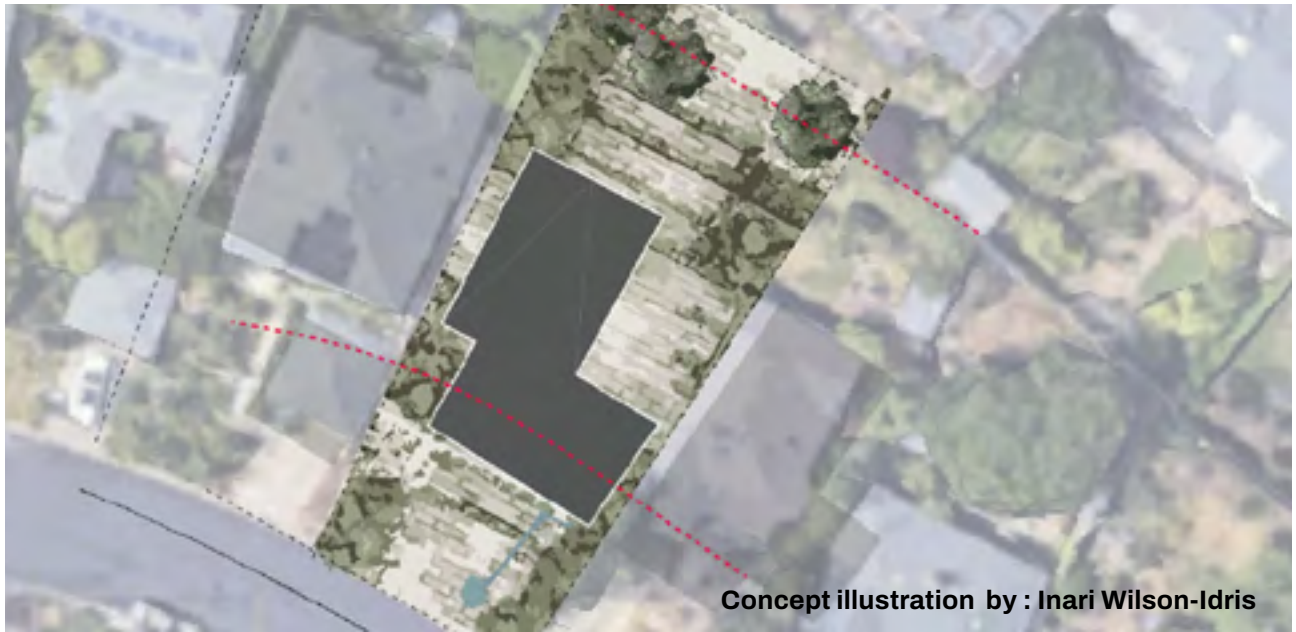
Zone 0 can be both fire-safe and inviting. It is a highly visible space, so we've included inspiring ideas to help you create a welcoming area that also reduces wildfire risk.

Common non-combustible ground-cover materials include brick, gravel, stone, pavers, decomposed granite, or concrete in place of vegetation or mulch. Select surfaces and installation methods that allow for easy sweeping, raking, blowing, or vacuuming to prevent debris from accumulating. Keeping the area clean and free of debris is essential.

Rather than treating Zone 0 as a strict five-foot buffer, think of it as an outdoor extension of your living space. Incorporating hardscape into a patio or outdoor "room" can make the area more usable and inviting while supporting your fire-smart landscaping goals.

Zone 0 Design Ideas

- Outdoor seating - Use metal, stone, or concrete seating to create a cozy place to sit.
- Statement pots - Use non-combustible ceramic or metal containers that are easily movable, to add life without increasing risk.
- Mosaics & patterns - Decorative pavers, stone inlays, or mosaic tile can turn a plain surface into a focal point.
- Art instead of plants - Sculptures made of stone or metal add personality without adding fuel.
- Calm with water - A recirculating water feature adds movement and sound.
- Texture over greenery - Mix decomposed granite, gravel, brick, or stone to create visual interest, no mulch required.
- Give trees a hug - Large trees taller than the structure are fire-smart, and can remain!



SHEET MOSS



CALAMANDRIN ORANGE TREE



OLIVE TREE



WHITE PEA GRAVEL



TEXTURED BEIGE STUCCO



PINK & PURPLE LAVENDER



DWARF LEMON TREE



TERRACOTTA



SANDSTONE



BLACK GRANITE

Why Zone 0 Helps More Than Just Wildfire Safety

Zone 0 guidelines aren't only about wildfire risk — they also support a healthier, more resilient home. Thoughtful design close to the house helps manage water, protect foundations, stabilize soil, and reduce dust and debris near living areas. Designed with durable, non-combustible materials, **Zone 0 works quietly year-round to protect your home while creating a cleaner, more intentional outdoor space.**

Additional Benefits of a Well-Designed Zone 0

Better water control - Porous hardscape surfaces, proper drainage, and intentional grading and terracing help slow, spread, and redirect water away from foundations, reducing runoff and moisture damage.

Healthier ground surfaces - Covering bare soil with rock, decomposed granite, or other non-combustible materials helps reduce dust and potential contaminants — especially important around older homes. According to the Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, covering exposed soil can help reduce the risk of lead exposure.

Stronger foundations & landscapes - Managing runoff and stabilizing soil near the home helps protect foundations, walkways, and adjacent landscaping from long-term wear and erosion.

Cleaner, calmer outdoor spaces - Less mud, less debris, less maintenance — Zone 0 can feel polished and intentional while quietly doing important work.

For special considerations, see the WAMMR process at the end of this guide.



Zone 1 - Low-growing, Well-maintained Plants with Stone Hardscape

Designing Zone 1 (5-30 Feet)

Zone 1 manages vegetation so an encroaching fire cannot easily move into Zone 0 and threaten the home. This area emphasizes low, well-spaced plants and the elimination of ladder fuels—the vertical vegetation that allows fire to travel from groundcovers into shrubs and tree canopies.

Effective Zone 1 landscapes use intentional plant groupings, clear bed separations, and species that perform well with limited irrigation and upkeep. This approach supports both wildfire resilience and long-term landscape health.

Zone 1 Design Ideas

- Keep plants closest to the home low and well maintained. Regularly remove dead leaves, needles, and other debris that can easily ignite from embers.
- Break up shrub groupings with ground cover. Low ground cover between shrubs helps slow fire spread if one plant ignites.
- Use hardscape to create separation. Paths, gravel walkways, and other non-combustible features divide planted areas and interrupt fire movement.
- Choose plants with fire behavior in mind. Avoid known high-hazard species such as juniper, bamboo, cypress, and pampas grass.
- Incorporate native and pollinator-friendly plants. These species are often better adapted to local conditions, require less water and maintenance.



Privacy Fencing

Improving Defensible Space

Find and Replace Flammable Materials: Reducing ignition risk near the home often involves identifying combustible items and replacing them with fire-resistant alternatives, particularly within Zone 0.

The following are some suggested actions

Hedges to Fences

Privacy hedges can be challenging to maintain in a way that reduces structural ignition risk while complying with code requirements. It's best practice to replace these hedges with non-combustible fencing or walls.

- Privacy can be achieved using a wide range of ember-resistant fencing and wall options. There are choices available for virtually every budget. Materials may include: metal posts with wire or welded mesh, fiber-cement panels with steel supports, solid metal fencing, or low walls made of rock, stucco, or brick. Choose what fits your budget and your home's character.
- For gates, wooden posts attached to the house may be retained, but the first five feet of fencing on either side should be replaced with non-combustible panels to reduce ignition risk closest to the structure.
- Outside of Zone 0, taller hedges may be used when maintained as a closed canopy and limbed up at least six feet above the ground. In these areas, non-combustible privacy fencing can also take the place of removed vegetation.

Hoses & Small Items

Everyday household items are common ignition sources during ember storms.

- Replace rubber or plastic hoses with metal garden hoses, or store hoses indoors or outside of Zone 0.



Defensible Space - Practical Improvement Ideas

Sheds & Storage Structures

Outbuildings and storage structures can be ignition sources if constructed with combustible materials. Some suggested actions:

- Use fire-resistant construction methods such as fiber-cement siding, metal, concrete block, or stucco.
- Design sheds to meet or exceed home hardening standards where possible
- Ensure you create defensible space around each outbuilding to prevent ignition from embers.
- Work with neighbors if moving a structure within five feet of a property line, as this could affect their landscaping.

Trash, Recycling, & Compost Bins

Trash and compost systems can generate sufficient heat to ignite a structure and should be carefully selected and placed.

- Keep all bins or compost systems outside Zone 0.
- On Red Flag days, store them in fully enclosed, fire-resistant container with a roof.
- Construct enclosures using materials comparable to home-hardening standards.

Emergency Supplies, Doormats, & Yard Equipment

Items stored near walls, under decks, or against the house can increase the risk of structural ignition.

- Store emergency supplies in metal, airtight, and watertight containers such as job boxes. Note that filled emergency water containers are not combustible.
- Replace combustible doormats with noncombustible options or move them indoors
- Relocate or replace yard equipment with non-combustible components and store items outside Zone 0 or in fire-resistant sheds or structures.



Defensible Space Inspection

The inspection process is intended to support progress and reduce the risk of wildfire spread. Inspectors focus first on the highest-risk conditions and work with each resident to establish a personalized plan and reasonable timelines for full resolution.

Many properties can complete initial defensible space actions quickly, and the Berkeley Fire Department (BFD) will work with you throughout the process.

Here's how you can begin:

1. **Self-Inspect Your Property:** Use the BFD defensible space self-inspection checklist to walk your property and identify potential issues before requesting an inspection. Pay particular attention to combustible materials within 5 feet of the home. Note any questions to discuss with a BFD inspector.
2. **Schedule a Fire Department Inspection:** Request an inspection from the BFD to identify the highest risk areas, establish priorities, and create a personalized compliance plan. Violations focus on the most critical items and do not result in penalties if addressed within the agreed timeline, and many compliance plans may take a few years to achieve. This inspection is also required to access available grants and city services.
3. **Complete Your Personalized Plan:** Implement the plan according to the agreed upon schedule, typically beginning with priority actions within 60 days. Inspectors will follow up to review progress and provide guidance. Ongoing communication and steady progress help ensure compliance while keeping the process supportive rather than punitive.

Request a FireWise assessment as an alternative resource: Homeowners who are not ready to talk to BFD inspectors may choose to meet with a local FireWise Ambassador for informal guidance and creative, community-based solutions. These assessments are advisory only and are not used by BFD to identify violations.



Defensible Space Zone Illustration

Self-Inspection Checklist- Quick Guide

Zone 0 - Ember Resistant Zone

Applied 0-5 ft from any structure

- Remove ALL vegetation** from within 5 ft. of all structures EXCEPT mature trees (consult a Berkeley Fire Department inspector).
 - Remove ALL debris**, including palm fronds, leaves, grasses, and weeds.

Be sure to clean roofs, gutters, & solar panels. Note: Where leaves accumulate is where embers will also collect and ignite first.
 - Limb trees** extending into the Zone 0. Limbs must be removed or thinned, and must be 5 feet clear of a roof, and 10 feet clear of a chimney.
 - Limit combustible items** like plastic or wooden outdoor furniture and storage cabinets. Relocate firewood to outside this zone.
 - Use hardscape** like gravel, pavers, or concrete around the first 5 feet of your home. No combustible mulch.
 - Replace combustible fencing, gates, & arbors** attached to the home with metal or other non-combustible alternatives.
 - Relocate garbage & recycling bins** outside this zone (> 5 ft) or keep them in your garage. Always remove from Zone 0 during fire weather.
- PERMITTED**
- Non-combustible planters** (= \leq 5gal) with plants that are less than 18-inches in height that can be easily moved indoors, or outside of Zone 0 during fire weather.
 - Mature shade trees** do not have to be removed, but must be adequately pruned to minimize risk.
- RECOMMENDED**
- Install mesh** on all vents, gutters, and around deck openings to prevent debris collection and prevent ember ignition.



Zone 0 - Potted Herb Garden



Zone 1 - Rock Garden

Zone 1 - Lean, Green & Clean

Applied 5-30 ft from any structure

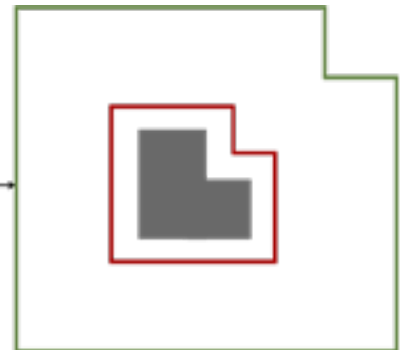
REMOVE:

- All dead or dying vegetation** including trees, shrubs, leaves, palm fronds, grasses, and weeds on the property.
- Fire-hazardous trees, shrubs & grasses**, including Italian Cypress, Acacia, Eucalyptus, Pine, Thuja Juniper, Bamboo, Rosemary, Pampas & Jubuta Grass, Scotch, Spanish and French Broom, Gorse. Removal is highly recommended but not required.
- Logs or stumps** embedded in the soil or isolate from other vegetation for 10 ft. in all directions.
- All flammable waste accumulation.**

RELOCATE & INSTALL:

- Relocate lumber and firewood** +30 ft. from structures, then enclose using an ember-resistant container or cover.
- Store flammable liquids** in a sealed container. Place container indoors or +30 ft. from buildings, vegetation, mulch, or other combustibles.
- Install contrasting address numbers** that are easily visible from the street and at least 4" tall.

Zone 1
5 to 30 ft from structure





Zone 1 Garden Example - Featuring limbed trees, well-maintained additional plantings, and stone walls

Zone 1 - Lean, Clean & Green - Continued

Applied 5-30 ft from any structure

TRIM & LIMB:

- Strip hanging bark** from trees up to 6 ft. or 4x the height of understory vegetation, whichever is greater.
- Trim or remove branches** that overhang within 10 ft. of a roof or chimney opening. Exceptions are allowed if removal would jeopardize the health or stability of the tree.
- Provide horizontal separation** of tree crowns: Maintain 10 ft. to 30 ft of spacing, depending on property slope. If separating the tree canopy is not feasible, increase the removal of ladder fuel vegetation at ground level to compensate and help limit vertical fire spread.
- Provide horizontal separation between shrubs** and/or ground cover plants: 2x height = flat ground, 4x = moderate slope, 6x = steep slope.
- Prune trees along the roadway** to maintain at least 13 ft. 6 in. of vertical clearance to allow fire engines and emergency vehicles to access your neighborhood safely.
- Cut annual grasses and weeds** to 4" or less and remove clippings within 30 ft. of all structures.

Zone 2 - Extend Defensible Space

Applied 30-100 ft from any structure

More Defensible Space may be needed depending on your property's slope, vegetation, or building construction. Extend Zone 1 recommendations up to 100 feet from structures and coordinate with your neighbors for adjacent areas.



Native Plants - California Poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*

Native Plant List

Keeping Berkeley Fire-Safe doesn't mean giving up on your garden. By carefully planning and maintaining your outdoor spaces, you can still enjoy gardening and make the most of your yard.

Selecting plants native to your area helps preserve ecological diversity, supports local pollinators and wildlife, and offers benefits such as improved drought tolerance, lower maintenance, and enhanced fire safety. Opting for native plants not only makes your landscape more beautiful for you but also creates a more harmonious environment for the surrounding ecosystems.

Look For

- Regionally native plants
- Leaves that are thick, waxy, and/or have high water content
- Plants that have leaves, not needles
- Plants with open-growth structures
- Low-growing plants
- Plants with little to no dead wood
- Trees that tend to be clean, not bushy, and have little deadwood
- Taller shrubs that are clean, not bushy or twiggy

While the plants listed are considered more fire-resistant than others, no plant is completely fireproof. Fire safety depends not only on plant selection but also on proper maintenance and upkeep. All plants, regardless of type, can become flammable if not properly watered, pruned, and maintained. We strongly recommend regular care, including removing dead or dry vegetation and spacing plants appropriately, to reduce fire risk. This list is intended as a guide and should be used in conjunction with local fire safety recommendations and regulations.



Native Plants - *Clematis lasiantha*, *Lupinus albus*, *Phyla nodiflora*, *Diplacus aurantiacus*

Native Plant List

Ground Cover

Beach Strawberry- *Fragaria chiloensis*

Common Lippia- *Phyla nodiflora*

Common Thrift- *Armeria maritima*

Creeping Red Fescue- *Festuca rubra*

Kinnikinnick- *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*

Seaside Daisy- *Erigeron glaucus*

Stonecrop- *Sedum spathulifolium*

Wild Ginger- *Asarum caudatum*

Woodland Strawberry- *Fragaria vesca*

Vines

Chaparral Clematis- *Clematis lasiantha*

Dutchman's Pipevine- *Aristolochia californica*

Pink Honeysuckle- *Lonicera hispidula*

Shrubs

Ashyleaf Buckwheat- *Eriogonum crocatum*

Bush Anemone- *Carpenteria californica*

California Lilac- *Ceanothus*

Catalina Currant- *Ribes viburnifolium*

Coffeeberry- *Frangula californica*

Coastal Bush Lupine- *Lupinus arboreus*

Creeping Mahonia- *Berberis aquifolium*

Giant Coreopsis- *Leptosyne gigantea*

Hollyleaf RedBerry- *Rhamnus ilicifolia*

Island Snapdragon- *Gambelia speciosa*

Kinnikinnick- *Manzanita or Arctostaphylos*

Lemonade Berry- *Rhus integrifolia*

Monkey Flower- *Diplacus aurantiacus*

Pacific Rhododendron- *Rhododendron macrophyllum*

Sandhill Sage- **Salvia sonomensis**

Santa Cruz Island Buckwheat- *Eriogonum arborescens*

Sea Cliff Buckwheat- *Eriogonum parvifolium*

Silver Lupine- *Lupinus albifrons*

Spiny Redberry- *Rhamnus crocea*

Tree Mallow- *Lavatera assurgentiflora*

Western Azalea- *Rhododendron occidentale*



Native Plants - *Quercus agrifolia*, *Heuchera*, *Ranunculus californicus*, *Festuca rubra*

Trees

Big Leaf Maple- *Acer macrophyllum*

Box Elder Maple- *Acer negundo*

Buckeye- *Aesculus californica*

California Ash- *Fraxinus dipetala*

Coast Live Oak- *Quercus agrifolia*

Holly Leaf Cherry- *Prunus ilicifolia*

Mountain Mahogany- *Cercocarpus betuloides*

Oregon Ash- *Fraxinus latifolia*

Western Redbud- *Cercis occidentalis*

Perennials

Blue-Eyed Grass- *Sisyrinchium bellum*

Bluff or Cliff Lettuce- *Dudleya farinosa*

Broadleaf Lupine- *Lupinus latifolius*

Buckwheats: coast, nude- *Eriogonum*

Buttercup- *Ranunculus californicus*

California Aster- *Symphotrichum chilense*

California Fuchsia- *Zauschneria californica*

California Fuchsia- *Calistoga* -
Zauschneria canum

Checkerbloom- *Sidalcea malviflora*

California Poppy- *Eschscholzia*

Coral Bells- *Heuchera micrantha*

Coyote Mint- *Monardella villosa*

Creeping Red Fescue- *Festuca rubra*

Douglas Iris- *Iris douglasiana*

Golden Yarrow- *Eriophyllum confertiflorum*

Great Valley Gum Plant- *Grindelia*
camporum

Gum Plant- *Grindelia stricta*

Hedge Nettle- *Stachys ajugoides*

Island Alum Root- *Heuchera maxima*

Ithuriel's Spear- *Triteleia laxa*

Lizardtail - *Eriophyllum staechadifolium*

Penstemon Margarita BOP- *Penstemon*
heterophyllus

Redflower Buckwheat- *Eriogonum*
grande

Red Fescue- *Festuca rubra*

Sandhill Sage- *Salvia sonomensis*

Silver Lupine- *Lupinus albifrons*

Sulphur Buckwheat- *Eriogonum*
umbellatum

Sword Fern- *Polystichum munitum*

Wallflower- *Erysimum capitatum*

Western Bleeding Heart- *Dicentra*
formosa

Western Columbine- *Aquilegia formosa*

Yarrow- *Achillea millefolium*

Yellow-eyed Grass- *Sisyrinchium*
californicum

Yerba Buena- *Clinopodium douglasii*



FireSafe Landscaping - Noncombustible Hardscape & Low-maintenance Plantings

Additional Resources

BFD Resources



berkeleyfiresafe.org: The Berkeley Fire Department's community-facing wildfire preparedness website.



berkeleyfiresafe.org/programs: The Berkeley Fire Department provides free programs designed to help residents achieve and maintain defensible space.



berkeleyfiresafe.org/wammr: Visit this page to learn whether a Wildfire Alternate Means and Measures Request (WAMMR) is right for your property.



berkeleyfiresafe.org/firesafe-landscape-gallery: Explore real FireSafe Berkeley landscape examples and submit your finished FireSafe yard to inspire others.

Non - BFD Resources



cafiresafecouncil.org/2025-fire-safe-vendor-list/: Download the California Fire Safe Council vendor list.



berkeleyfiresafecouncil.org/firescaping: Visit Berkeley Fire Safe Council website for their recommended list of landscapers, arborists, and contractors.



berkeleyfirewise.org: a great website to help you find your local FireWise community, reach out for help from neighbors, and understand what the community around you is doing.



homesandgardens.com/gardens/fire-smart-landscaping-ideas: Visit this home and garden page for more inspiration.

