



25 Kentucky Firewise Tips

Access to your home affects how easily firefighters can find and reach your home.

1. In mid-summer when vegetation is fully leafed-out, go out to the road and see if you can read your address marker. If you can't, you may need to move the address marker to a more visible site or make it larger so it can be easily read from the road. Remember that smoky conditions or darkness may make it harder to see your address.
2. Widen your driveway to at least 12 feet and prune overhanging branches to a height of 14 feet. If your driveway is longer than 150 feet, widen to 20 feet. Also make sure that your driveway has a solid driving surface and all culverts and bridges can accommodate heavy fire trucks which can weigh up to 10,000 pounds. Curves in long driveways need to be gentle to accommodate large emergency vehicles.
3. If your driveway is over 150 feet long, make sure there is a large turnaround near the house. The turnaround radius should be at least 30 feet.

Development of a 30-foot defensible zone around your home can determine whether it can survive a wildland fire.

4. Look at the trees around your home. If your trees are predominantly evergreens, a ten-foot minimum space between the tree crowns should be maintained. This distance keeps fire from jumping through the crowns. Be sure to maintain this distance from tree to house. You may need to remove a few trees.
5. Look at the vertical arrangement of the vegetation. Is there continuous fuel (grass, leaves, branches) reaching from the ground to the crowns of the trees? These are called ladder fuel because they provide a "ladder" for fire to climb from the ground to the crown. You can eliminate these ladder fuels by mowing the tall grass, trimming shrubs and pruning the lower tree branches six to ten feet up.
6. Relocate the firewood pile conveniently placed by the back door to outside the home's defensible zone by March each year. Sparks from a wildfire can easily catch in firewood piles and the intense heat of those burning piles next to the house can catch your home on fire.
7. Each spring, clean fallen tree leaves and evergreen needles that accumulate in foundation plantings, next to buildings and under decks. Take special care to clean out dead leaves from shrubs planted next to buildings.
8. Use rock and stone landscaping materials next to buildings.

9. Clean up your home defensible zone. Remove lumber piles, downed trees and other debris (tires, old cars, etc.). Remove obstructing debris and trees and make sure fences have easily accessible gates.
10. Keep the lawn watered and mowed short (three inches or less) on all side of all buildings. A short, green lawn will not carry fire.
11. Since evergreen trees are more flammable than hardwood trees, you will need to remove enough evergreen trees within a 100 foot perimeter of your house so their branches are at least 10 feet apart. Prune the lower branches of the remaining evergreens up six to ten feet, but no more than one-third of the total live crown.
12. Clear a 10 foot space around propane tanks. Keep this space in gravel, rock or short, well-watered grass. Propane tanks should be located at least 10 feet from the home.

Home modifications can greatly reduce wildland fire risk but can be expensive.

13. When updating your home, consider less flammable materials such as brick, stone and metal for roofing and siding.
14. Does the fireplace chimney have an effective spark arrestor? Inspect your chimney annually for cracks in the brick and liner. Clean your fireplace and wood stove chimneys at least twice a year.
15. Clean the roof of leaves, needles and other debris each spring. Also clean accumulations of leaves from windowsills.
16. Make sure the soffits are enclosed with a solid barrier and that vents are screened with a fine mesh to keep out flying embers.
17. Radiant heat from a large wildfire can actually ignite sheer curtains inside of homes through large glass windows. Consider closeable shutters for large windows.
18. Enclose foundations of homes, outbuildings and trailers, plus decks and overhangs with solid flame-resistant sheeting to keep sparks from igniting materials underneath.
19. Make sure you have smoke detectors on each floor of your home and check them each fall to make sure they are in good working conditions.

The burning practices of you and your neighbors can contribute to the risk of home loss from wildfire.

20. If you burn leaves and debris, consider alternatives such as composting.

21. Make sure recreational fires are made in a fire-safe pit or container and completely extinguished before leaving. Before lighting any outdoor fire, check for local restrictions and permit requirements. Avoid lighting fires when high winds, high temperatures and low humidity levels are present or predicted.
22. Do not dispose of ashes until they are cold to the touch.
23. Store gasoline, oily rags and other flammable materials in approved safety cans. Keep those safety cans in a fire-resistant metal or brick building or your garage.
24. Are there any branches close to power lines on your property? Ask the power company to clear them.
25. Make sure motorized garden equipment, such as lawnmowers and chainsaws have approved and functioning spark arrestors.