



ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY

Defensible Space Requirements/Recommendations for Homeowner Association Common Areas



Accept Responsibility to Protect Your Community

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Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Introduction | 3 |
| General Landscape and Viability Requirements | 4 |
| Mandatory Removals | 4 |
| Landscape Features | 5 |
| Groundcovers | 5 |
| Shrub Masses | 5 |
| Hedges | 6 |
| Cactus | 6 |
| Trees | 6 |
| Spacing Requirements | 7 |
| Horizontal Spacing | 7 |
| Vertical Spacing | 7 |



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Scope:

The Defensible Space Requirements/Recommendations for Homeowner Association Common Areas document is a sub-set of the Vegetation Management Requirements/Recommendations for HOA's and applies in the absence of a Fuel Modification Zone Plan.

***Regulations for wildfire safety are dynamic, and new requirements may be enacted by the State of California and its regulatory agencies at any time. Landscaping must comply with all state requirements for vegetation management and wildfire safety, in addition to the requirements in this guideline. Where a conflict between this guideline and other applicable regulations exists, the more stringent or specific requirement will apply.**



INTRODUCTION



OVERVIEW

As it relates to Defensible Space, Homeowners Associations are guided by the Public Resources Code and Government Code. Because Homeowner Associations have control over residential property, the distance for Defensible Space starts at a building or structure that is within the control of the Homeowners Association which may be located on residential property under the jurisdiction of the Homeowners Association. Defensible Space requirements are applicable in the absence of a Fuel Modification Zone Plan.

GENERAL

- These requirements pertain to any common area landscape that is within 100 feet of a building or structure in, upon, or adjoining a mountainous area, forest-covered land, brush-covered land, grass-covered land, or land that is covered with flammable material.
- Recommend removal of plant and tree types per OCFA's Undesirable and Invasive Species list.
See: https://ocfa.org/documents/?_document_categories=ready-set-go
- If an approved fuel modification plan is on file, and the requirements in this document are more stringent, the requirements in this document shall take precedence. A copy of the plan must be available onsite for reference.
- Crews shall have all applicable safety equipment, as well as appropriate fire suppression tools within 25 feet of the work location.
- In areas that are geologically sensitive, a report prepared by a licensed geologist or equivalent shall be submitted to OCFA prior to work commencing.
- In areas that are deemed habitat, a report prepared by a biologist or equivalent shall be submitted to OCFA prior to work commencement.

GENERAL LANDSCAPE AND VIABILITY REQUIREMENTS

- All landscape must be alive and thriving. All dead and dying landscape materials must be removed.
- Landscape that has a woody thatch shall be removed.
 - Woody thatch shall be defined as decomposed plant material buildup between the living material and soil.
- Groundcover that cannot be pruned and maintained to less than 2 feet shall be removed.
 - Groundcover shall be defined as any planting that is continuous, covering an area more than 100 square feet.
- Ornamental grasses are not considered a groundcover and must be approved by OCFA. Ornamental grasses shall be sheared to 4 inches from grade annually in spring.
- Trees installed as part of the original development are exempt from spacing and species removal requirements unless specifically stated by OCFA.
- All thatch and/or duff materials shall be raked and removed off-site immediately. No more than 4 inches of duff materials is allowed.
 - Duff shall be defined as leaf litter or vegetation litter.
- Landscape mulch of any kind shall not exceed a depth of 4 inches. See page 8 of the Vegetation Management Maintenance Guidelines for Property Owners for recommended application of mulch.

MANDATORY REMOVALS

- Any landscape that is dead, dying or considered non-viable. Non-Viable may also be landscape that cannot be pruned and remain viable to meet spacing requirements.
 - Viable is defined as landscape that can survive hard pruning or shearing.
- Any tree/shrub that is a “volunteer” and or not spaced as part of the original planting plan.
 - Volunteer is defined as a seedling or sapling that was not purposely planted in that location or planted by a homeowner on common area property.



LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Groundcovers

Definition: landscape plantings that are continuous and spreading horizontally.

Guideline: All groundcovers shall be maintained perpetually to a height of no more than 2 feet.

Examples: groundcovers that grow to a maximum of 2 feet include, but are not limited to, Acacia Redolens 'Desert Carpet', Carissa 'Green Carpet', and Myoporum Parvifolium.

Shrub Masses

Definition: single species of plant, planted in a close group.

Guidelines:

- In locations where shrub masses are present, the shrub massing shall not exceed a height of 6 feet.
- Shrub masses shall not exceed a coverage area of 400 square feet without a break.
- When shrub masses are present, the spacing between each mass shall be no less than 15 feet.
- Recommend removing shrub masses within 30 feet of a structure.
- When a shrub mass is located on a slope with a grade of 2:1 or greater, no shrub mass shall be permitted within 6 feet of the property delineation (property line that separates HOA property from adjacent property owner).
- When a shrub mass is in a flat planter bed, no shrub mass shall be permitted within 2 feet of the property delineation (property line that separates HOA property from adjacent property owner)

Examples: Typical shrubs used in masses include, but are not limited to, Xylosma, Escallonia, and Raphiolepis.

Hedges

Definition: single species of plant, planted in a lineal row.

Guidelines:

- No hedge shall exceed a height of 5 feet.
- No hedge shall exceed a width of 2 feet.
- No hedge shall be permitted to grow within 2 feet of property delineation (property line that separates HOA property from adjacent property owner).

Examples: typical hedge plants include, but not limited to, Ligustrum Texanum, Raphiolepis, and Photinia.

Cactus

Guidelines:

- Cactus when planted in masses shall not exceed more than 400 square feet.
- When masses of Cactus are present, a minimum space between masses shall be no less than 15 feet.
- Cactus masses shall be maintained free of weeds.
- Cactus shall not be planted within 6 feet of a property delineation (property line that separates HOA property from adjacent property owner).

Trees

Guidelines:

- All trees shall be of the same type and spacing as per the original development.
- Remove all volunteer trees.
- California Live Oak shall be maintained in a native state unless specifically required by OCFA.
- Spacing from groundcover to the lowest tree branch shall be no less than 6 feet.
- Spacing from a planting mass to the lowest tree branch shall be no less than 8 feet.
- Spacing from a hedge to the lowest tree branch shall be no less than 8 feet.

SPACING REQUIREMENTS

HORIZONTAL SPACING

Vegetation Less than 2 Feet in Height:

- No horizontal spacing or vertical spacing is required.
- Groundcover shall not exceed 2 feet in height.

Shrubs and Trees 2 Feet in Height or Greater- Group Sizes:

- All shrubs and trees should be in groups of three specimens or less.
- Groups need to be separated 3 times the height of the tallest shrub or 15 feet minimum whichever distance is greater.
- Shrubs greater than two feet in height shall be no closer than 15 feet from the edge of the canopy(s) measured horizontally.

Shrub Group Spacing: The grouping cannot be less than 15 feet regardless of any species height in a group

- No horizontal spacing is required within this group.

***Slopes greater than 40% (2:1) require horizontal spacing of 6 times the height of the tallest shrub.**

Tree Group Spacing:

- No tree/branch shall be allowed to grow within 10 feet of an enclosed structure.



VERTICAL SPACING

Shrubs and Trees Less than 10 Feet in Height:

- When located within 30 feet of a structure a minimum of 2 feet of vertical separation is required.

Shrubs and Trees 10 Feet in Height or Greater:

- A vertical separation of at least 10 feet is required from vegetation below.
- All vegetation located underneath trees, shall be maintained at a maximum height of 2 feet.

The objective of VEGETATION MANAGEMENT is to reduce the wildfire threat to a home by changing the characteristics of the vegetation adjacent to the home.