

## **CFA'S LANDSCAPING FOR BUSHFIRE PUBLICATION – Q & A**

### **1. What is this publication?**

CFA's *Landscaping for Bushfire: Garden Design and Plant Selection* publication offers guidance on how to design and make appropriate plant selection for residential gardens, subdivisions and other developments in high bushfire risk areas.

The publication is supported by an online Plant Selection Key which can be used to assess the flammability of plants, and helps decide its suitability for landscaping around homes in high bushfire risk areas.

### **2. Can I protect my home from bushfire if I landscape the garden according to the advice in this publication?**

Do not rely on a well designed garden to protect your home from bushfire – it's just one component of bushfire preparation. You also need to think about water supply, access, house construction and maintenance.

While a well designed garden may help reduce the risk of bushfire destroying your house, the safest option is always to leave high risk areas early on Code Red, Extreme and Severe days.

Visit [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) for more information about bushfire preparation and to download the FireReady Kit.

### **3. Why did you write this booklet? Do I need to read this if my plan is to leave early?**

CFA's *Landscaping for Bushfire: Garden Design and Plant Selection* publication has been written to provide guidance designing or retrofitting gardens in high risk areas. It forms part of CFA's response to Recommendation 44 from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

While the safest option is to leave high risk areas early on days of high fire risk, a well designed garden can help reduce the risk of house loss in a bushfire regardless of the occupants or the fire services being able to actively defend it.

Designing your garden with an appropriate level of defensible space and maintaining your house and garden to the necessary standards will improve the chances of the house surviving during a bushfire.

### **4. Am I in a high risk area? Should I landscape my garden to reduce the bushfire risk?**

You can use CFA's FireReady Kit to find out if you are in a high risk area, as well as to learn more about house maintenance and property preparation.

Landscaping for Bushfire is useful for anyone in a high risk area because it helps reduce the risk of house loss in a bushfire, even if the plan is to leave early.

By incorporating the design principles and choosing plants with low flammability you can help reduce the amount of radiant heat, flame contact and ember attack on your house in a bushfire.

### **5. Would a well designed garden design assist my permit application to build in a Bushfire Management Overlay area?**

Yes. A landscape plan prepared in accordance with these guidelines will make it easier to meet the application requirements of a Bushfire Management Statement, which is required for a Bushfire Management Overlay permit application.

The permit requirements to address bushfire risk are specified in Clause 52.47 of the planning scheme. Mandatory Standard BF5 under Clause 52.47-5 requires that 'the location, type and layout of proposed landscaping, revegetation or any native vegetation off-set does not increase the bushfire risk to the proposed development or the adjacent area.'

### **6. Am I required by law to make my garden comply with this document?**

If you have an existing house in a high risk bushfire area you are not required by law to design your garden in accordance with this booklet. However, the advice is valid and applicable to anyone living in a high risk area to give their house the best chance of survival during a bushfire.

If you are building in the Bushfire Management Overlay there will be vegetation management conditions on the planning permit that you must comply with under the *Planning and Environment Act, 1987*. Permit conditions are enforced by local Council and you should check the specific conditions on your permit to ensure you are compliant.

The information in this booklet is consistent with the standard permit conditions for new developments in the Bushfire Management Overlay and explains how to design a garden that would comply with the standard conditions.

## **7. Is there a list of plants that I can look at without having to read the publication?**

No. While there is a Plant Selection Key included in the publication, there is not a list of plants that can be deemed low risk.

The four example gardens include plants that are suitable for those particular locations. These can be found on pages 19-33 of the booklet.

There are a number of reasons CFA does not provide a simple list of plants, these include the fact that:

- plants will grow differently in different parts of the state. A plant that has low flammability under particular growing conditions may not have the same flammability if it is grown elsewhere.
- some plants require specific maintenance. If a list is provided in isolation of advice about where is appropriate to locate or the maintenance requirements, the plant can become a hazard.
- the most important aspect of garden design and maintenance in high bushfire risk area is to establish defensible space around the house. Within this space the location and arrangement of plants is more important for reducing the spread of bushfire than the flammability of an individual plant species.

There are many advantages to the Plant Selection Key over a list:

- You can use it to assess the flammability of any plant. A list may not include any of the particular plants you are interested in but the Key lets you determine the flammability of any plant.
- It can be used on existing gardens to work out if what you already have in your garden is appropriate.

## **8. What are some of the worst trees to have in my garden?**

The booklet goes through some of the plant characteristics that affect the flammability of a plant, which can include stringy or loose bark, dead material being retained on the plant, and low branch height.

Another important consideration is the location of trees in relation to the house and other vegetation. For example, trees should not overhang the house and you should not have any shrubs planted underneath them. Shrubs should not be planted near windows.

Further information can be found on pages 34-41 of the publication.

## **9. Is it true that non-native plants are better than natives in bushfires?**

All plants burn in severe bushfire conditions. The suitability of a plant species depends on where the individual plant is sited, its separation from other plants or flammable structures, its age, drought conditions and level of garden maintenance. These aspects are independent of the origin of a plant species.

Many introduced garden, agricultural plants and some native plants are weed species which create problems for farmers, gardeners and bushland managers. They also increase bushfire risk. It is recommended that weed species are targeted for removal and avoided when making selections for fire smart landscaping.

## **10. Is it expensive to design a garden using *Landscaping for Bushfire*? Are there any government grants available?**

The focus of *Landscaping for Bushfire* is around creating defensible space, where to plant and the types of plant characteristics you should look for. A well designed garden should not cost any more than any other garden.

While there are no current government grants that CFA is aware of, check with your local Council to find out what support is available.

#### **11. How should I use this booklet?**

*Landscaping for Bushfire* follows the process of planning, designing and then planting your garden. The best way to use it is to read through each section taking note of the design principles and information about defensible space.

Once you have decided on the layout of your garden you should look use the online Plant Selection Key to choose what plants you want to use in your garden. It takes you through some questions about the plant and provides you with a printable report and the flammability rating.

#### **12. What is the online Plant Selection Key?**

The Plant Selection Key is based on an American Flammability Key but has been adapted to suit Australian conditions. Used in conjunction with the *Landscaping for Bushfire* publication it provides a flammability rating for a plant as well as whether it can be planted within defensible space.

#### **13. This is very complex, is there anything that is more simple?**

Plant selection can be a complex process, which is why the online Plant Selection Key is such a handy tool. It takes you through some questions about the plants you are interested in using or already have and provides a printable version of the flammability rating for that plant.

The Fire Ready Kit also provides information about things you can do to prepare your property for bushfire.

CFA Fire Safety Officers can come and assess the bushfire risk to your property as part of the free Home Bushfire Advice Service. You can book in for the service through the CFA website or by calling the Victorian Bushfire Information Line.

#### **14. Can someone come out and look at my garden?**

CFA Fire Safety Officers can come and assess the bushfire risk to your property as part of the free Home Bushfire Advice Service. You can book in for the service through the CFA website or by calling the Victorian Bushfire Information Line.

#### **15. Is this publication available in other languages / audio format?**

This is a technical publication aimed at those working in a building and planning environment. While this version is currently only available in English, there are plans to produce a more user friendly document later in the year which may be made available in alternative formats depending on the demand.

#### **16. Is there further information available on this topic?**

CFA's FireReady Kit provides information about property and garden maintenance, as well as bushfire preparation in general.

Many local councils provide advice on local native plants, weed control and green waste management services. Visit your council's website to find out what resources are available.