

## Landscape Care in the Post-Firestorm Era

Since the 1920's, several fires have occurred in the East Bay Hills, some serious enough to have caused extensive property damage and loss of life. After each fire, experts have recommended ways to prevent future disasters, but most residents and city officials have either remained ignorant of or disregarded these findings. Let's be sure this doesn't happen again!

According to the Final Report of the Mayors' Firestorm Task Force, flammable structures, which often spread fire to vegetation, may create more risk than the vegetation itself. And, while some plants may be more "fire prone" than others, placing blame on and removing one or two species of trees will not make the Hills safe from fire. In fact, while switching over to less fire-prone plants can help, changing our landscape designs and maintaining yards on a regular basis are most likely to reduce vegetation-related fire risk - for both individual homeowners and neighborhoods.

Crucial factors noted in the Report include interrupting "fire pathways," which allow fires to travel quickly among plants and structures, and reducing "biomass" - the "fuel" created by dense and poorly maintained foliage. Plantings close to or touching structures - or on steep slopes adjacent to them - create particularly serious hazards, as do plants that are underwatered or allowed to accumulate dead matter. Fire crews assess factors like these when deciding whether to try and save a particular house, or to pass it by in favor of one more likely to survive.

In other words, we need to make a major shift in how we landscape and manage our landscapes in the Hills. We realize how painful it can be to face that the thick vegetation surrounding our homes, which has given us such comfort, contributed seriously to the Firestorm. Many of us involved with the Task Force have worked to bring together and disseminate creative solutions to this dilemma. We believe that fire-resistant and ecologically sound landscape designs can retain your privacy and be beautiful too.

Now, as the dry season is upon us, consider what steps you wish to take to increase your safety. You might want to schedule a consultation with us to assess any potential dangers in your current landscape. You might also want to organize a more comprehensive consultation for your block or neighborhood association. Our experts will identify fire pathways, areas of intense biomass, and particularly fire-prone plants. We will also suggest changes that can reduce your fire risk, as well as save water and protect slopes.

Brende & Lamb can also do the work necessary to adjust your landscape design or, in association with a highly skilled landscape designer, execute an entirely new one. Our artistic approach and long commitment to ecological practices guarantee that our services are of the highest quality available. Our expert crew of tree care professionals can highlight each of your trees' and shrubs' unique natural beauty, while helping you make the transition to a safer, more appropriate landscape.

Please call us for a comprehensive consultation and/or a free estimate. We are fully insured and would be happy to refer you to neighbors who will praise our work. We also encourage you to get involved in holding public officials accountable for the maintenance of adjacent wildlands. This is just as crucial as maintaining your own property.