

# Taking Care of Your Landscape After The Fire

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Remember many plants can recover after fire depending on the severity of the burn. It is important to leave existing vegetation if the plants do not threaten personal safety or property (hazardous trees in danger of falling should be identified first). Trees that look burned or have their needles scorched are not necessarily dead.

## How to Tell if Plants are Dying or Dead?

- Look for burns on the tree trunk. If the bark on the trunk has been burned off or scorched by very high temperatures completely around the circumference, the tree will not survive. Where fire has burnt deep into the trunk, the tree should be considered unstable.
- Look for burnt roots by probing the ground with a rod around the base of the tree and several feet away from the base. Roots are generally six to eight inches below the surface. If the roots have been burned, you should consider this tree very unstable, and it may be toppled by wind.
- A scorched tree is one that has lost part or all of its leaves or needles. Healthy, deciduous trees are resilient and may produce new branches and leaves as well as sprouts at the base of the tree. Evergreen trees may survive when partially scorched. An evergreen tree that has been damaged by fire is subject to bark beetle attack. Please seek professional assistance from Nevada Division of Forestry, Forest Health Specialist at 684-2500 concerning measures for protecting evergreens from bark beetle attack.
- Peel back a bit of bark on twigs. If there is a thin layer that is green or white and juicy looking, the twigs are still alive. Check many twigs. Cut a quarter size or smaller piece of bark off the trunk – is there a green/white juicy layer? If yes, the trunk is still alive.
- Are the buds still green and moist or dry and brittle?

## What Can Resprout (regrow from the roots) After Fire?

- TREES: Box elder, red maple, birch, hackberry, green ash, honey locust, sweetgum, crabapple, aspen, swamp white oak, gambel oak, black locust, willow, giant sequoia
- SHRUBS: serviceberry, greenleaf manzanita, fourwing saltbush, littleleaf peashrub, red osier dogwood, mormon tea, apache plume, ocean spray, honeysuckle, St. John's wort, mock orange, western dwarf ninebark, desert peach, bitter cherry, chokecherry, skunkbush sumac, silver buffaloberry, spiraea, snowberry
- GROUND COVERS: yarrow, ivy, periwinkle, many grasses

## **Will the Soil Absorb Water?**

- If you pour a cup of water on the soil, will it go into the soil? If not, scrape an inch or two off the soil and try again. If the water won't penetrate the top 1-2 inches of soil, rake the ground to loosen the impermeable layer. Mulch the area with straw after raking to help it absorb water.
- Severely burned soils may take up to a year to absorb water. If the simple method above doesn't help, call the Natural Resources Conservation Service, 883-2292, for guidance.

## **Control Soil Erosion**

- Fell damaged trees across slopes to slow water runoff after rainfall
- Create check dams in drainages using straw bales
- Spread straw to protect the soil and reseeding efforts
- Use water bars to reduce soil erosion on roads.

## **Help Your Plants Recover**

- If water will soak into the soil, water your plants out to the dripline (where the branches extend from the trunk)
- Fertilize with a mild solution of a low-grade fertilizer like a 10-10-10 – ¼ cup in 3 gallons of water in concentric rings around the plant
- Protect the trunks of plants from the sun – wrap with a permeable substance like cardboard or tree wrap or paint them with a water based white paint (do not use oil or petroleum products because they kill plants)
- Prune off dead, broken, or severely damaged limbs

If the fire didn't burn the soil too deeply, many plants can survive. Many seeds can come up from stored seed in the soil. Think safety first and check for unstable trees that may fall. Then be caring to the remaining plants and be patient. Plants can be very resilient. You may want to have a certified arborist appraise the health of your trees for insurance purposes.

Call JoAnne Skelly at Cooperative Extension at 887-2252 for guidance on replanting your landscape after fire and on how to incorporate landscape design for wildfire defense for the future. Or email questions to [skellyj@unce.unr.edu](mailto:skellyj@unce.unr.edu).