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Australian Plants for Fire Prone Areas

The following article is based on one published in the March 1994 issue of "Native Plants for New South Wales", the newsletter of the Society's NSW Region. It resulted from numerous inquiries that were received following the disastrous New South Wales bushfires of January 1994. At that time little information was available on plants suitable for planting in areas subject to bushfire threats. Since 1994, more information has become available - see "[Further Information](#)" below.

Please note that we know of no plant that is completely non-flammable. The Society cannot guarantee that the species listed in the article will not burn...they are simply more resistant than many other species.

All plants, whether they are exotic or Australian, will burn when subjected to sufficient heat. Different fire conditions have varying effects at different times on the same species. Nevertheless, trees of the type recommended in the following list, if correctly sited, conserve moisture, serve as a wind break by absorbing and deflecting radiant heat from the fire and act as a barrier to flying sparks and embers. In any area likely to be subject to bush fires, attention must be given to proper planning and regular maintenance. The following are some of the factors that should be considered.

- Plant trees at least 5 m from house to allow clear access. Have paved sections such as paths and barbecue areas and/or a pebble garden with herbs near to the house.
- Position pools, tennis courts, etc., between house and direct line of fire threat. A lawn is a clear space that can be used as a fire break.
- Space trees and shrubs to avoid continuous canopy that may carry fire. Careful arrangement of plants is essential. Don't have trees that overhang the house.
- Use plants around the house that can be pruned when fire threatens. Trees and shrubs with lignotubers will re-sprout and recover quickly if it is necessary to cut them back hard in the face of threatening fire.
- Monitor the growth of trees and shrubs so that pruning is maintained, dead limbs removed, leaves put into compost bins with lids.
- Avoid combustible door mats and brush fences. Use draft sealers around doors and screens on windows.
- Avoid growing Conifers, rough fibrous bark trees such as *Syncarpia glomulifera* and "candle bark" trees (loose bark hanging from tree). Eucalypts of the following type are hazardous: *E. globoidea*, *E. viminalis* and *E. oreades*.

**"All plants, whether they are exotic or Australian, will burn
when subjected to sufficient heat."**

The following list was compiled from various sources. A key to the symbols used is given at the end of the list.

Rainforest Trees

Alectryon subcinereus (st), Callicoma serratifolia (s/st), Canthium coprosmoides (ls/st), Cassine australis (st), Croton insularis (s/st), Cupaniopsis anacardioides (s/mt), Cuttsia viburnea (s/st), Denhamii celastroides (st), Diospyros australis (s/st), Eleocharis reticulatus (s/st), Eupomatia laurina (s/st), Glochidion ferdinandii (st), Grevillea robusta (lt), Guioa semiglaucata (st), Hodgkinsonia ovatiflora (st), Lomatia fraseri (s), Mallotus philippensis (s/st), Melia azedarach (s/mt), Hymenosporum flavum (s/mt), Petalostigma triloculare (st), Podocarpus elatus (mt), Rapanea howittiana (s/st), Rapanea variabilis (s), Rhodospaera rhodanthema (s/mt), Sarcopteryx stipata (s/m), Scolopoa braunii (s/mt), Stenocarpus sinuatus (lt), Streblus brunonianus (s/mt), Symlocos stawellii (st), Symlocos thwaitesii (st/mt).

Other Trees

Acacia dealbata (mt), Acacia elata (lt), Acacia melanoxylon (mt*), Agonias juniperina (st), Allocasuarina verticillata (mt), Angophora costata (lt), Banksia integrifolia (mt), Brachychiton acerifolius (lt), Brachychiton populneum (lt), Buckinghamia celsissima (mt), Casuarina glauca (lt), Casuarina cunninghamii (lt), Corymbia (syn.Eucalyptus) maculata (lt), Eucalyptus alpina (mt*), Eucalyptus pauciflora (mt*), Heterodendrum oleifolium (ls/st), Hymenosporum flavum (st), Lophostemon confertus (lt), Lagunaria patersonii (s/mt), Myoporum insulare (s/st), Pittosporum spp (mt/st*), Syzygium smithii (mt).

Other Small Trees/Shrubs

Acacia baileyana (ls), Acacia cultriformis (ls), Acacia howittii (st), Acacia iteaphylla (ls), Acacia praxifolia (ls/st), Acacia prominens (ls/st*), Acacia saligna (st), Acacia sophorae (s), Acacia terminalis (st), Acacia vestita (ls), Acacia spp. others suited to site, Atriplex spp (ss), Angophora hispida (st/s), Banksia marginata (st/s), Bursaria spinosa (ls/st), Cassia spp. suited to site, Dodonaea spp. suited to site, Einadia hastata (ss), Eremophila maculata (s), Grevillea spp. suited to site, Hakea elliptica (s), Hakea salicifolia (st), Hakea suaveolens (s), Jacksonia scoparia (ls), Maireana spp (ss), Rhagodia baccata (s).

Ground Covers

Ajuga australis, Carpobrotus glaucescens, Dichondra repens, Einadia nutans, Eremophila debilis (syn. Myoporum debile), Hardenbergia violacea (will climb), Kennedia prostrata (*), Kennedia rubicunda (will climb), Myoporum parvifolium, Pelargonium spp (*), Pultenaea prostrata, Scaevola spp.

Key to Plant List

ls large shrub
 lt large tree
 ms medium shrub
 mt medium tree
 s shrub
 ss small shrub
 st small tree
 * species not included in the original article (refer Newsletter of SGAP Victorian Region, December 1984)

Further information

Several books are available which provide detailed information on bushfires and bushfire protection. There are also a number of useful resources on the internet. Some of the most detailed references are listed below.

Books:

- Webster, Joan (2000), **The Complete Bushfire Safety Book**, Random House Australia.

Internet:

- [Australian Native Plants For Fire Protection](#) - compiled by Neil Marriott for the Australian Plants Society (Victoria)
- [Bushfires - An Integral Part of Australia's Environment](#).
- [Fire and Biodiversity: The Effects and Effectiveness of Fire Management](#). Proceedings of the Conference held 8 - 9 October 1994, Footscray, Melbourne.
- [Fire Resisting Garden Plants](#): Tasmania Fire Service.
- [How Fires Affect Biodiversity](#).
- [Landscaping for Bushfire: Garden Design and Plant Selection](#); A comprehensive guide by the Country Fire Authority, Victoria.
- [Online Plant Selection Key](#) by the Country Fire Authority, Victoria.

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