

FIREWISE PLANT RECOMMENDATIONS

Placer County Sierra Nevada

Based on the Placer County LID Guidebook – Appendix A
Developed by Robie Wilson Litchfield, ASLA

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Purpose

Identify plants and trees suitable for Low Impact Development (LID) site design in Placer County's High Sierra areas, with fire hazard defensible space ratings.

Origin

Adapted from Placer LID Guidebook Technical Advisory Committee by Robie Wilson Litchfield, ASLA.

FIRE HAZARD RATINGS

Each plant is rated for Defensible Space considerations. Ratings vary by fire district, always consult your local fire district to verify.

LOW

✓ Preferred near structures

Slow to ignite, minimal fuel load. Ideal within 30 ft of buildings.

e.g. Penstemons, native strawberry, creeping thyme, sedge grasses, monkeyflower, Jacob's Ladder

MEDIUM

⚠ Use with care

Space appropriately and maintain regularly. Can work in Zones 2–3 when managed.

e.g. Sagebrush, manzanita, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, chinquapin, huckleberry oak, western juniper

HIGH

✗ Avoid near structures

High resin or dense dry-fuel content significantly increases ignition risk.

e.g. Dense conifer thickets (lower limbs uncleared), accumulated leaf litter species, dry brush

RECOMMENDED SHRUBS

Lower Fire Hazard

Common Name	Scientific Name	Water Needs	Sun Exposure
Snowberry	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Mod-Wet	Sun/Part Shade
Mountain Spirea	<i>Spiraea densiflora</i>	Wet-Mod	Sun/Part Shade
Alpine Currant	<i>Ribes alpinum</i>	Wet-Mod	Sun/Part Shade
Redstem Dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Wet-Mod	Sun/Part Shade
Western Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Mod-Dry	Sun/Part Shade
Blue Elderberry	<i>Sambucus cerulea</i>	Wet-Dry	Sun/Part Shade
Wood's Rose	<i>Rosa woodsii</i>	Mod Wet	Sun/Part Shade
Mountain Alder	<i>Alnus tenuifolia</i>	Wet	Sun/Part Shade

Native species preferred. Many tolerant of seasonal wet and dry cycles typical of the Sierra Nevada.

RECOMMENDED TREES

Ponderosa Pine

Pinus ponderosa

Classic Sierra Nevada native; prune lower limbs

Med Risk

Jeffrey Pine

Pinus jeffreyi

Vanilla-scented bark; high Sierra native

Med Risk

White Fir

Abies concolor

Plant 5g or smaller for best establishment

Med Risk

Incense Cedar

Calocedrus decurrens

Native, adaptable to sun/shade

Med Risk

Quaking Aspen

Populus tremuloides

SEZ zone; note invasive root system

Low Risk

Giant Sequoia

Sequoiadendron giganteum

Majestic landmark; California native

Med Risk

Crabapple

Malus spp.

Ornamental accent; many cultivars

Low Risk

Hawthorn

Crataegus spp.

Accent tree; many cultivars available

Low Risk

GROUNDCOVERS & PERENNIALS

Groundcovers

- **Pinemat Manzanita**
Dry, full sun, low fire hazard, drought tolerant
- **Creeping Thyme**
Mod-Dry, sun/part shade, low fire hazard
- **Mountain Strawberry**
Wet-Mod, sun/part shade, low fire hazard
- **Bearberry Manzanita**
Mod-Dry, sun/part shade, native option
- **Creeping Cinquefoil**
Wet-Mod, moderate traffic tolerance
- **Sulphur-flower Buckwheat**
Dry, full sun, excellent for slopes

Top Perennials

- **Penstemon species**
Low fire hazard, native, sun/part shade
- **California Poppy**
Annual, low hazard, dry to mod-wet
- **Columbine**
Wet-mod, part shade, many cultivars
- **Lupine**
Mod-dry, accent, many species
- **Western Aster**
Wet-mod, sun/part shade, native
- **Arrowleaf Balsam Root**
Mod-dry, native perennial

WATER & DROUGHT TOLERANCE

Matching plants to your site's natural moisture reduces supplemental irrigation, critical for fire-safe, sustainable landscaping.

**Drought Tolerant
(No Supplemental Water)**

Sagebrush · Greenleaf Manzanita · Rabbitbrush · Bitterbrush · Mountain Pennyroyal · Sulphur-flower Buckwheat · California Fuchsia

**Tolerates Wet &
Dry Periods**

Snowberry · Vine Maple · Mountain Spirea · Sierra Currant · Western Chokecherry · Creeping Wildrye · Idaho Fescue

**Better with
Supplemental Irrigation**

Shrubby Cinquefoil · Lilac Hybrids · Common Lilac · Viburnum species · Ninebark · Tall Fescue · Physocarpus

GRASSES FOR FIREWISE ZONES

Native and adapted grasses provide erosion control, habitat value, and lower fuel loads than dense dry brush.

Native Grasses

- **Idaho Fescue**
Festuca idahoensis Wet-Dry, versatile
- **Squirreltail Grass**
Elymus elymoides Dry, full sun
- **Tufted Hair Grass**
Deschampsia cespitosa Mod wet, sun/part
- **Ticklegrass**
Agrostis scabra Wet-Dry
- **Slender Beaked Sedge**
Carex athrostachya Wet-Dry
- **Prairie Junegrass**
Koeleria macrantha Wet-Dry

Turf & Adapted Grasses

- **Hard Fescue**
Festuca ovina var. Low water, sun/part
- **Blue Fescue**
Festuca glauca Ornamental, mod wet
- **Creeping Bentgrass**
Agrostis stolonifera Turf, wet
- **Perennial Ryegrass**
Lolium perenne Mod wet-dry, turf
- **Intermediate Wheatgrass**
Elytrigia intermedia Dry, drought tolerant
- **Sandberg Bluegrass**
Poa sandbergii Wet-Dry



PLANTS & TREES TO AVOID

The following species carry a HIGH fire hazard rating or pose specific risks near structures. Avoid in Zone 1 (0-30 ft) and use with extreme caution in Zone 2.



Greenleaf Manzanita

Dense resinous foliage; extreme fire hazard rating



Sagebrush

Highly flammable dry brush; high fire hazard



Bitterbrush

Dense dry shrub; high fire hazard rating



Rabbitbrush

Dry resinous stems; high fire hazard



Mountain Whitethorn

Extremely flammable; high fire hazard rating



Chinquapin

High fire hazard; dense dry foliage



Western Juniper

Highly resinous; medium-high fire hazard



Narrow-leaved Willow

Listed as invasive; use cautiously near SEZ



Huckleberry Oak

Dense dry shrub; high fire hazard rating



Lodgepole Pine (dense)

Dense stands increase fire ladder risk significantly



Skunkbrush Sumac

High fire hazard; avoid in defensible space zones



Ponderosa Pine (unmanaged)

Lower limbs create fire ladder without regular pruning

★ Always verify with your local fire district, hazard ratings and defensible space rules vary by jurisdiction.

KEY PLANTING TIPS

Prefer natives

California natives are adapted to local rainfall and require minimal supplemental water once established.

Match water to site

Choose drought-tolerant species for dry exposures; wet-tolerant for swales, bioretention, and snow storage zones.

Zone your planting

Use lowest fire-hazard plants within 30 ft of structures. Space plants well and maintain clearance from rooflines.

Avoid high-hazard species

Remove or avoid sagebrush, manzanita, and dense conifers close to buildings. See the Avoid slide for the full list.

Consult a professional

Have a licensed landscape architect familiar with LID evaluate your site before planting.