



EMBERPROTECT · FIREWISE COMMUNITY GUIDE

Firewise Decor

*Fire-safe choices for **every zone** around your home*

What you place, plant, and store around the house is a major factor in whether it survives an ember storm. This guide works from the first five feet, where the rules are strictest, out to the property line, covering mats, furniture, fire pits, mulch, woodpiles, and seasonal touches.

Placer County · Sierra Nevada foothills

Homes don't usually burn from the flame front



90%+

of homes lost in wildfires are ignited by wind-driven embers, not by direct contact with the flame front.



Embers travel far ahead of the fire

Burning fragments ride the wind a mile or more, landing in drifts against walls, on decks, and in any nook that catches them.



They look for fuel right at the house

An ember only matters if it lands on something it can ignite. Bare gravel snuffs it out; a coir mat or a wood chair turns it into a structure fire.



The first 5 feet decides the outcome

Research from IBHS and CAL FIRE points to this narrow band, the immediate zone, as the most ignition-prone space on the whole property.

THE FRAMEWORK

Three zones, each with its own decor rules

0

ZONE 0 0 - 5 ft

The ember-resistant zone. The strictest rule: zero combustible material, decor must be noncombustible.

1

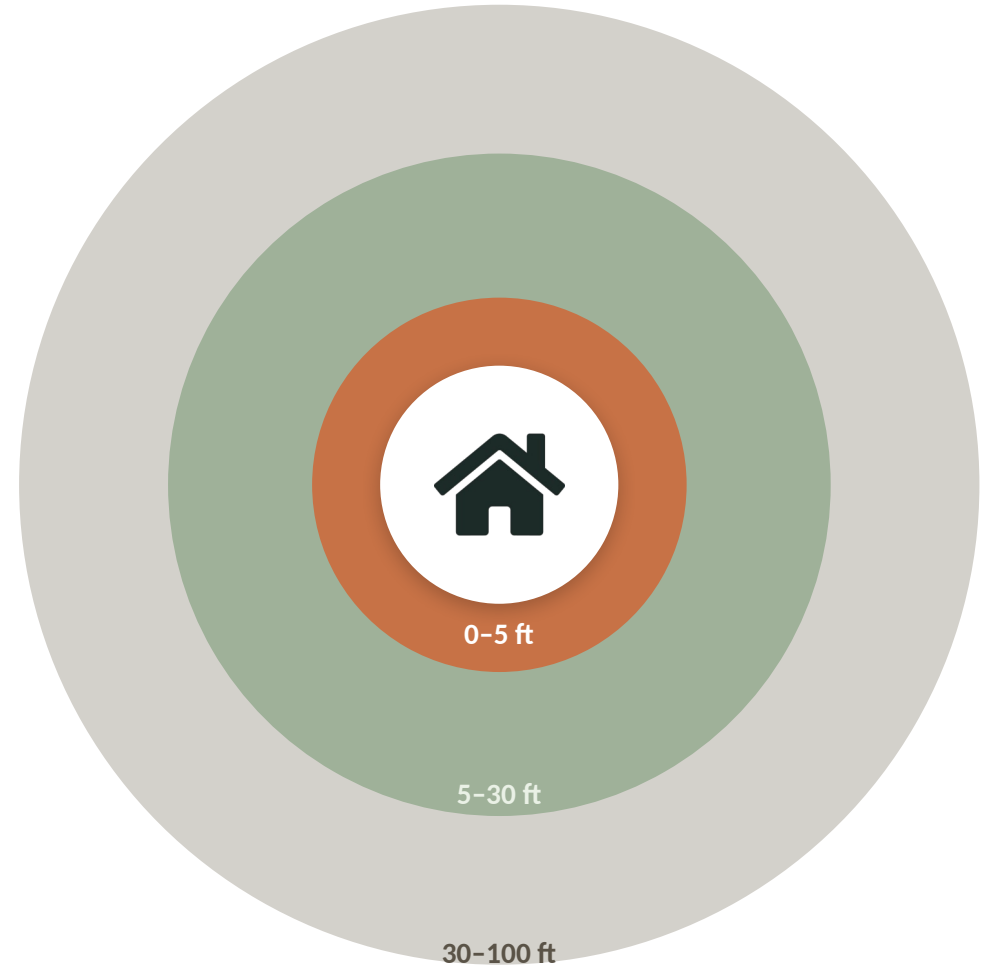
ZONE 1 5 - 30 ft

Lean, clean, green. Decor can burn here, but keep it spaced and tidy so flames can't bridge to the house.

2

ZONE 2 30 - 100 ft

Reduce fuel. The big features and the woodpile live here, spaced out so fire stays low and slow.



Attached decks count as part of the home, Zone 0 wraps around and under them.

ZONE 0, THE ONLY RULE YOU NEED TO REMEMBER

Within 5 feet of the house, aim for **zero combustible material.**

Everything else in this guide is just that rule applied to specific objects. If an ember lands in this band, it should find nothing to catch.

THE OLD MINDSET

A decorative backdrop

The strip against the house is treated as a place to dress up, bark mulch, shrubs, a cozy chair, a welcome mat.



THE FIREWISE MINDSET

Part of the home's defense

The same strip becomes a working buffer: hardscape and noncombustible objects that give embers nothing to ignite.

PRACTICAL SWAPS

Swap combustible decor for noncombustible

COMMONLY FOUND IN THE FIRST 5 FT



Jute, coir or woven doormat



Heavy rubber or metal-grate mat



Wood / wicker furniture + fabric cushions



Solid metal furniture; cushions stored indoors



Bark or wood-chip mulch beds



Gravel, crushed stone, pavers or bare soil



Potted plants pushed against the wall



Empty stone / ceramic pots; plants past 5 ft



Wood trellis, lattice or planter boxes on walls



Metal or masonry; relocate the climber outward

GOOD NEWS

Decor you can keep right against the house

Solid, dense, noncombustible objects are welcome in Zone 0, they can be every bit as decorative.



Solid metal furniture & sculpture

Iron benches, aluminum chairs, metal art, no fabric or foam left out.



Concrete & natural stone pieces

Birdbaths, statues, stone planters and pavers shrug off embers.



Glazed ceramic & terracotta pots

Fine as long as the pot sits on hardscape and isn't packed with flammable plants or bark.



Gravel, rock & hardscape features

A river-rock bed or flagstone border is the most ember-proof 'decor' there is.

One catch: even 'fire-resistant' plants are still combustible. Keep all living plants, and their pots' contents, out of the first 5 feet.

The decorative details people forget



Under-deck & nook storage

The space under and behind a deck collects embers, keep it clear of stored cushions, decor and clutter.



Seasonal & holiday decor

Hay bales, corn stalks, dried wreaths and pumpkins are classic Zone 0 ignition fuel. Stage them past 5 ft.



String lights & outdoor electrical

Lights strung through dry foliage or along wood add both fuel and an ignition source. Mount on metal.



Fences & gates that touch the house

A wood fence is a wick leading embers straight to the wall, transition to metal or masonry near the home.



Bins, firewood & 'temporary' piles

Trash and recycling carts, the firewood stack and stacked lumber all count as decor's combustible cousins.



Wreaths, baskets & door dressing

Dried-vegetation wreaths and hanging baskets sit exactly where embers gather, choose noncombustible versions.

DESIGN TIP

Keep the beauty, just move it outward

A firewise Zone 0 doesn't have to look like a bare strip of dirt. The trick is relocation, not removal.



Push the lush stuff past the 5-ft line

Specimen plants, flower beds and the showy pots all live just beyond Zone 0, close enough to enjoy, far enough to be safe.



Make the first 5 ft an intentional border

Pavers, decorative gravel or a stone band read as a designed 'architectural edge,' not an afterthought.



Frame it with boulders, pottery & lighting

Anchor the outer edge with noncombustible features so the eye lands there, the buffer becomes the feature.

THE LAYOUT



0-5 ft • gravel / pavers, kept clear

Beyond 5 ft • plants, pots & lighting



Enjoy the greenery, just hold it back from the wall.

BEYOND THE FIRST FIVE FEET

Further out, the goal shifts, from **remove** to **space out**.

In Zone 0 the enemy is the ember, so the rule is zero fuel. Past 5 feet the concern becomes flame climbing and spreading, so decorative things can be combustible, as long as nothing forms a continuous chain of fuel leading back to the house.



Decor here can burn, so keep it spaced and tidy

Combustible furniture and features are allowed in this band. The job is to break up the fuel: keep gaps between objects and plants, and choose fire-resistant, well-watered greenery.



Outdoor furniture & play structures

Fine here, just clear vegetation around them and leave a gap from shrubs and trees so flame can't pass along.



Fire pits, grills & propane

Site fire features on gravel, pavers or stone with clearance overhead and to the sides; keep propane tanks 10 ft from structures.



Mulch & decorative beds

Bark or composted mulch is acceptable here, keep it watered, pull it back from the house, and break big beds up with stone or paths.



Sheds, arbors & outbuildings

Treat a shed like a small building, not yard art: give it 10 ft of clearance to bare soil, with low, clear planting beyond.



Move the woodpile out: firewood and lumber don't belong in Zone 1, relocate them to Zone 2, or store in a fire-resistant enclosure.

Where the woodpile and bigger features belong



Firewood, lumber & woodpiles

This is their home. Keep 10 ft of clearance to bare soil on all sides, well away from anything that could carry flame to a structure.



Gazebos, pergolas & play sets

Larger decorative structures work fine out here, keep them spaced from trees and from each other.



Decorative & shade trees

Welcome, but space the canopies, limb them up, and clear the litter underneath so fire can't climb.



Garden art & sculpture

Noncombustible metal, stone and ceramic pieces can go anywhere, great anchors for the far landscape.



A red-flag staging spot

During a nearby wildfire, this is where to drag cushions, umbrellas and the BBQ propane tank, 30 ft+ from the house.

MULCH FIRE-RISK RATINGS

Mulch is not just decorative. Material type, distance from the home, depth, moisture, and maintenance all affect fire behavior.

LOW

✓ Preferred near home

Preferred near structures and in Zone 0.

e.g. gravel, river rock, decomposed granite, pavers, concrete, bare mineral soil

MEDIUM

△ Use with care

Use with care in spaced islands farther from the home.

e.g. composted wood chips, arborist chips, bark used away from siding and broken by hardscape

HIGH

✗ Avoid near structures

Avoid near structures because they can ignite, smolder, or spread embers.

e.g. rubber mulch, pine needles, shredded bark, gorilla hair, dry continuous organic mulch

KEY MULCH TIPS

Keep Zone 0 noncombustible

Use gravel, rock, pavers, concrete, or bare mineral soil within 0–5 ft of the home.

Break up fuel beds

Use paths, patios, dry creek beds, edging, or bare soil to interrupt mulch continuity.

Use organics carefully

Composted chips can help soil health farther from structures when used in separated, maintained beds.

Maintain before fire season

Remove leaves, needles, weeds, and windblown debris from mulch and hardscape areas.

Keep mulch shallow

Avoid thick organic layers that dry unevenly, smolder, or accumulate fine fuels.

Check local guidance

Ask your local fire district or Firewise coordinator before installing mulch near structures.

California is formalizing the 5-foot zone



From guidance to regulation

- ✓ California's AB 3074 directs the Board of Forestry to create a 0–5 ft "ember-resistant zone" on top of the existing 0–30 ft and 30–100 ft defensible-space zones.
- ✓ A 2025 state executive order pushed this Zone 0 standard toward statewide rulemaking, with new requirements aimed first at the highest fire-risk areas.
- ✓ The recurring theme across drafts: no combustible material in the first 5 feet, which is exactly what the decor choices in this guide are about.



What it means for our neighborhood

Rules and effective dates are still moving and vary by location. Treat this guide as best practice, and confirm the current Zone 0 requirements with CAL FIRE and Placer County / your local fire authority before counting on a specific date or detail.

Doing it now keeps you ahead of the requirement, and can help with insurance and inspections.

THE TAKEAWAY

Your zone-by-zone checklist



Zone 0 (0–5 ft): clear it, noncombustible decor only, nothing stored under decks.



Zone 1 (5–30 ft): keep furniture, fire pits and sheds spaced and on clear ground.



Zone 2 (30–100 ft): stack woodpiles here with 10 ft of clearance; space the big features.



Zone 0: swap mats, furniture, mulch and pots for metal, stone or gravel.



Zone 1: move firewood and lumber out to Zone 2.



Re-walk all three zones each season, especially before fire season.

