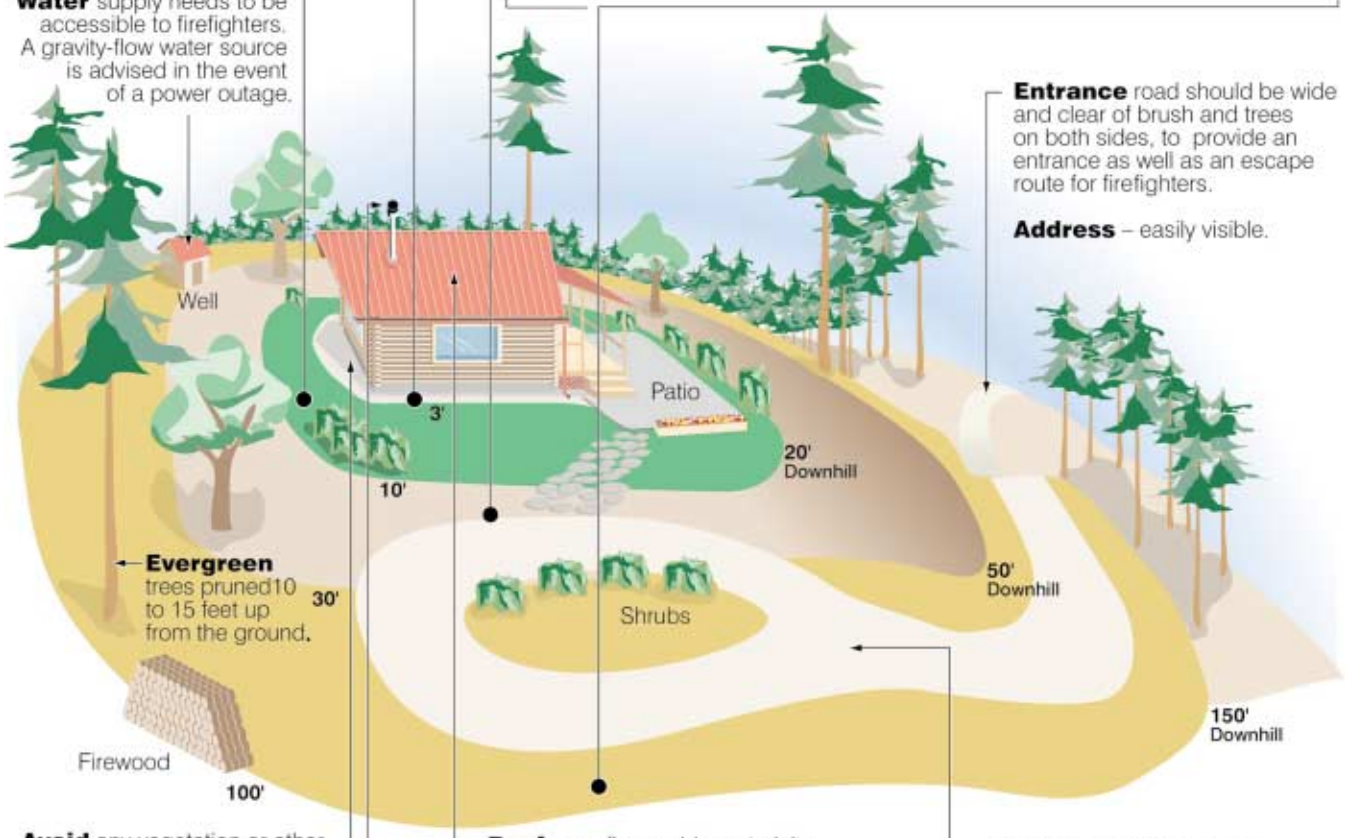
Landscaping for woodland homes

ZONE 1 - This area, closest to the house, is the most critical for fire protection. Have nothing flammable, including tall grass, evergreen trees, and shrubs, next to the house. Also, avoid trees that overhang the house or deck as well as leaves, brush, firewood piles, bark, mulch, and other burnables. Clean gutters, roof, and deck of flammable debris. This area does not have to be barren. Maintain a well-kept lawn, or use crushed brick or river stone gravel instead of mulch. Use raised beds, large decorative rocks, stone walkways, patios, or other features to create visual interest while maintaining a fuel break for forest fire safety.

ZONE 2 - Maintain a well-kept lawn, and avoid evergreens that catch fire easily and burn quickly. Occasional trees and shrubs should be at least 10 feet from the house and up to 20 feet away on the downhill side. Remove all downed wood fuel such as logs or branches, and avoid using railroad ties or other flammable material in your landscaping. Freshly tended flower beds, herb or vegetable gardens, rock gardens, stone walls, and driveways can also act as fire breaks.

ZONE 3 - Rake or use a leaf blower to remove needles, leaves, and twigs at least 20 feet from the house and up to 50 feet on the downhill side. Firewood and other burnables should be stored at least 30 feet from the house. Maintain surface vegetation at 3 inches high or less. This will help keep fire from spreading to or from your house. It also provides a space for firefighters to defend your home from fire.

ZONE 4 - Space trees with 10 to 15 feet between tree crowns, and prune trees 10 to 15 feet up from the ground or one-third the total live crown height, whichever is less. Also, avoid fire ladders, where fire can climb from the ground into tree branches. Do this by pruning trees, spacing tall trees away from medium-sized trees, and using ground cover or small plants under tall trees. Shrubs should be well-maintained, kept free from dead material, and kept small. Control brush and weeds annually, and remove all downed woody fuels more than 3 inches in diameter.



Source: Keep Montana Green Association

KEN BARNEDT/Missoulian