



“WHAT’S NEXT”?? WHAT TO DO AFTER A FIRE DISASTER

Below are a few good guidelines for restoring the landscaping and tree/limb damage at homes and businesses after a fire disaster.

- Do not cut back any plant material that was burned by the fire unless there are branches that are cracked or over-hanging homes, driveways, sidewalks, or any other location that may have human activity or valued property. Trees that have shifted in the soil due to wind or burn damaged should be removed as well.
- For the most part, if any native trees (mainly Oaks and Sycamores) or shrubs (Chaparral) have been burned and there is no hazard present, the trees and shrubs should be left alone. All of these plants have adapted to elements such as fire over thousands of years of exposure. Most of these plants (thought not necessarily all) will recover over time from the burn damage.
- Regarding fire-damaged plants, it is not recommended that watering be done shortly following a fire. However, the rainy (or wet) season is approaching; if drought conditions persist, rainfall is below average throughout the month of November, and/or no rain is forecasted in the immediate future, it is a good idea to irrigate the native plants. If average rainfall or above-average rainfall occurs, no additional water should be given to these plants.
- Precautions should be taken, such as using sand bags or other means to protect property from mud slides in case any heavy rains occur. Jute netting, grading or trenching may be necessary to protect homes and property. It is recommended that you contact your local fire department for their advice on these matters.
- Any pruning or cutting back of what appears to be dead or burned material should not be done until plants show signs of recovery. If other nearby plants show signs of recovery but there are plants of the same species that are not responding, it is recommended to wait and observe another few weeks. If, after that period of time, there is no new growth appearing from the base or from the branches, removal is suggested. Please note that the burned plant material can still be green underneath the bark in the roots. The stored sugars and carbohydrates will be allocated to the parts of the plants necessary for recovery from this damage.
- If soot has been deposited on leaves of existing landscape plants that remain untouched by the fire, they should be left alone and allowed to grow out of this damage. Spraying them off with water may help slightly; however, it is more likely that it will just take time for the plants to grow out of the soot damage. Fertilization is not recommended at this time. In general, obvious recovery in plants can be observed in the spring. At that time, fertilize at half rates as labels recommend if fire damage has occurred. I would wait until spring when obvious recovery is observed at that time if fire damage occurred fertilize at half rates as labels recommend.

Any landscape plants that were burnt should be treated as the native plants are. We all need to keep in mind that all plants are exposed to fire in their native environment and a lot of these trees and shrubs will recover in the spring. However the plants may no longer have desired aesthetic qualities and may need to be removed for that reason.