

So You Now Have the Old Home Place

*Part 7: Fire Protection, Landscaping, Barns,
Sheds and Shooting Areas* by James L. Cummins

This is the seventh in a series titled “So You Now Have the Old Home Place.”

In our previous article we discussed the cabin. In this one, we will discuss fire protection, landscaping, barns, sheds and shooting areas.

You’ve gotten your cabin built and set up; decorated and ready for occupancy. Now it’s time to get the grounds ready. Some people will take a more “natural” approach to landscaping; as in, “whatever nature grows, will suffice.”

While this might seem like the best way to develop a natural, low-maintenance landscape that is not necessarily the case. While taking into account what nature has already provided, you should still plan your landscaping.

Fire-wise landscaping and placement of outbuildings isn’t just for those dwelling on remote Western hilltops or those areas prone to wildfires. According to the National Fire Protection Association, brush, grass and forest fires occur nearly everywhere in the United States. So, let’s look at how your landscaping can help keep you safe, as well as look good.

FIRE PROTECTION

Fires on lands heavily populated with trees, even on a small scale, present a special challenge to local fire departments. That is why it is vital that you be able to access and maintain an emergency water supply. This is especially true if you are in a remote location.

It is recommended that you keep, at a minimum, 100 feet of garden hose attached to a spigot (if your water comes from a well, you

might also consider an emergency generator in case of power failure). Taking this precaution may be the key to saving your property should it be threatened with even a small fire.

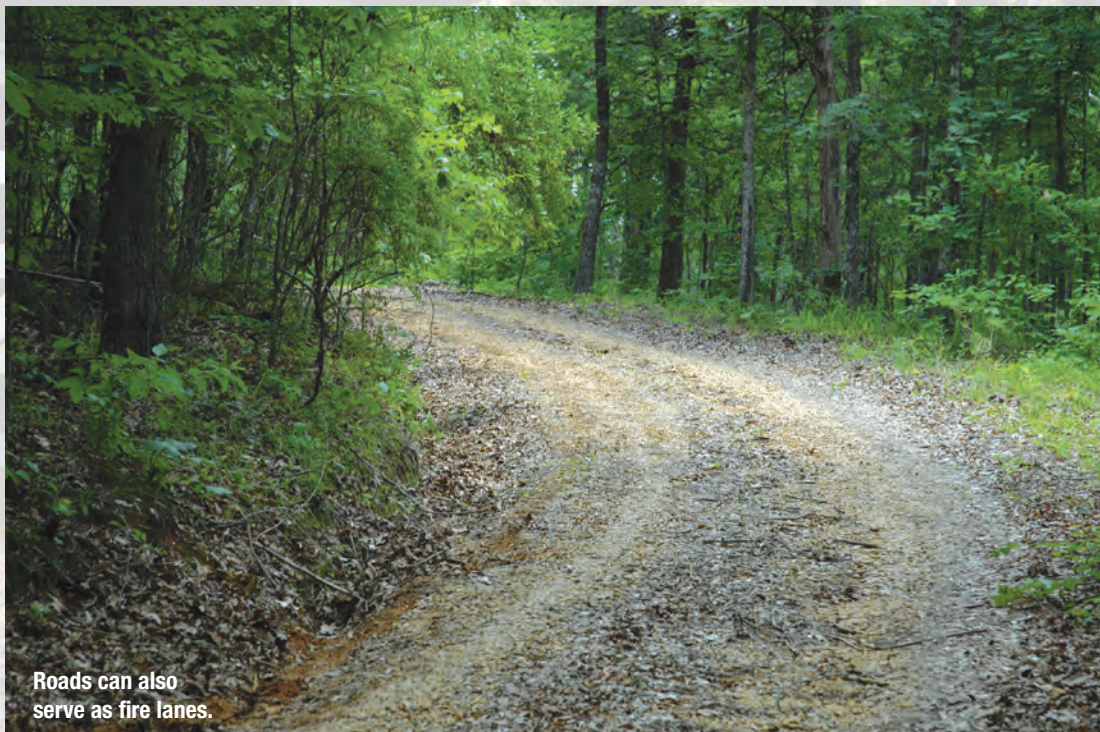
Most homes that burn during wildfires are ignited by embers landing on the roof, in gutters and on adjoining surfaces such as decks and porches. So, your first plan of action should be to create a buffer zone around your cabin to reduce sources of fuel.

LANDSCAPING

How one chooses to landscape is also important in fire protection. A good rule of thumb to follow is to keep the first 3 to 5 feet of area around your home free of all flammable materials and vegetation. This means refraining from planting plants, shrubs, trees and even grasses too close to your cabin. Also, do not use bark or other organic mulches in the immediate area surrounding your cabin. Typically, a neat perimeter of rock mulch or a rock garden around your cabin is the best thing to incorporate.

Maintenance is also extremely important. Be sure to clear leaves, pine needles and other flammable debris from roofs, gutters and eaves. Take the time to cut back any tree branches that overhang the roof of your cabin and clear debris from under any elevated surfaces attached to the cabin.

Beyond this immediate perimeter, you might consider adding hard surfaces such as driveways, gravel paths or rock patios and walkways. These features will add visual



Roads can also serve as fire lanes.



interest but serve a more important role in providing a barrier between vegetation and your home in the event of a fire.

Some additional things to incorporate into your fire-safety planning would include being diligent

to take care of the first 100 feet surrounding your home by thinning out trees and shrubs (particularly evergreens); trim low branches so they are a minimum of 6 feet off the ground; mow the lawn regularly and quickly

dispose of any clippings or other debris; and move woodpiles to a space at least 30 feet from your home.

Another important strategy would be to incorporate fire-resistant plants into your landscaping. Look for low-growing plants that have thick leaves, extensive root systems and the ability to withstand drought. Commonly used hostas and some roses are good choices, but your local nursery should be able to help you with an even wider variety that will suit your tastes and needs.

Good planning goes a long way in preventing wildfires. In a year such as the one we've had this year, looking over your landscape with a firefighter's eye, or better yet, asking one for suggestions, can offer significant advantages in the fight against fire.



Shooting benches can be built in open areas.

BARNs, SHEDs

Taking into account all the activities and maintenance that will be done on large areas of land, it goes without saying that you will need other



structures besides a cabin. The type of structures you will need depend on a number of things. Will you have livestock or horses? If so, you will need a barn sufficient for housing and caring for the animals. Will you do all of the land maintenance yourself? If you do, then a barn or shed will be needed to house and maintain your equipment. You will need to answer these questions before you begin construction on these structures. There are many barn and shed plans available on the internet and at your local building supply store. In planning construction, be sure and incorporate good security measures.

SHOOTING AREAS

When planning shooting areas on your property be sure that all applicable local, state and federal laws have been addressed. Make sure that any and all requirements are incorporated in the initial stages of planning to avoid any headaches later.

To me, a rifle range is a necessary

part of my operation. In planning a rifle range there are a few general considerations. A range should be established only if enough distance and land area are available to allow for surface danger zones (SDZs). The site should be remote from other activities but easily accessible. SDZs should not extend across traveled roads, waterways, railroads or other potentially populated areas. To protect against unauthorized access, SDZs should be controlled while firearms are being discharged. Firing into upward sloping land and land with natural backstops of hills or other naturally occurring land structures is recommended. If that is not available, several dump truck loads of dirt can be used to construct a backstop. I prefer a range that I can shoot up to 300 yards. You should also ask yourself how many shooters you would like to be able to accommodate at one time; what types of firearms and range of ammunition will be used; and what is the general purpose for the range.

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Some people prefer to have a skeet range on their property. When selecting a site for a skeet field, you should consider a tract that is relatively flat and well drained. The background should not be infringed upon by nearby buildings or other distractions. Factors such as future growth plans and accessibility to the area should also be considered. Take into account roadway access and any utility tie-ins when selecting your site. Also, make sure there are adequate safety zones down range. For best use of your skeet range, the skeet field should face northeast to allow the shooters the longest shooting times without the sun in their faces.

In the next issue of *Wildlife Mississippi* magazine, we will discuss wildlife management.

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