

## 'DEFENSIBLE SPACE'

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The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department has created a two-page guide for city residents explaining how to thin brush within 100 feet of structures to create what it calls "defensible space."

The regulations define the parameters of the defensible space and explain how to thin, when to thin and what to do with the debris.

The guide also informs property owners that much of the open space in the city is environmentally unique and describes the region as one where there are more "sensitive species than anywhere in the continental United States."

- The 100-foot buffer zone is divided into two parts.
- The first 35 feet from the structure – generally a backyard – must be watered regularly and consist of lawns, low-growing shrubs, some trees and little natural vegetation.
- The remaining 65 feet generally includes natural vegetation. It is within this zone that the city explains in detail how to prune and thin.
- Plants more than 2 feet tall must have the lower branches cut away, but none of the upper branches can be touched. The whole plant must be pruned so that it is shaped like an umbrella.
- The zone also must be thinned of plants. This means cutting down no more than half of the plants more than 2 feet tall to a height of 6 inches.
- The brochure includes illustrations to aid property owners in visualizing how the plants should look once they are pruned and how the entire area should look once the work is complete.
- There is small print at the bottom of the notice telling residents that nothing can be touched between March 1 and Aug. 15 because that is the nesting season for the California gnatcatcher, a tiny bird on the federal government's threatened species list.



**Online:** For the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department's brush management guide, go to [uniontrib.com/more/brush](http://uniontrib.com/more/brush)