



**Boulder
County**

Boulder County
Land Use Department
Publications

Installing Rock Around Structures

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Installing Rock Around Structures

Many homes across the nation have been lost to wildfires because of weak links in the homes' defenses. Simply installing rock or other non-combustible landscaping around the perimeter of the home can make a big difference in whether or not the home can withstand a fire.

The idea is to break up the continuity of the surface vegetation (grass for instance) with the exterior materials of the house (which all too often is wood siding).

The Basics

Some basic rules should be followed when installing crushed rock or decorative stone material around the house.

- Materials should be 1" to 1-½" in size, with no fine materials (sand, gravel) present.
- Materials should be installed over weed barrier material to help limit weed growth and reduce maintenance.
- Spread material to least 2" depth to hold fabric down and prevent embers from coming in contact with the material.
- Placing metal edging or larger stones along the edge will help keep the material from moving and grasses from encroaching upon the barrier.
- On steeper slopes, installing larger retaining rocks is important so the material doesn't migrate downhill. Creating tiers of larger material with smaller rock in between is helpful.
- Install materials beneath the dripline of the roof and other overhanging protrusions (such as windows). Generally, this means installing rock 3-5 feet from the edge of the foundation around the structure.
- Decks are special in that they need rock all the way from the foundation out 2' past the dripline of the deck (past the support columns). This is especially critical for ground level decks.
- Above ground propane tanks must have rock installed under and around them to help isolate them from grass and shrubs.

Of course, areas with concrete (such walkways, entryways and parking pads in front of garages) don't need to have additional rock installed. And, if you have a deck that has a concrete or flagstone patio underneath, you don't need to install rock underneath them, unless there are some areas of the deck that do not have ground cover.

Some Things Not to Do

- Do not use bark mulch near the foundation, as embers can easily ignite this material, fires can smolder for a long time, and pose a threat to the house.
- Do not plant junipers (or other highly flammable landscaping plants) within 15' of the house. This is a common occurrence, especially with older homes, and is a trap that homeowners can easily fall into when contemplating landscaping their rural homes.
- Do not neglect to install non-combustible materials. Simply leaving the ground in place is not sufficient, as over time weeds, grass and other plants can encroach upon this area.
- If you have a deck that is over 16" from the ground it is important not to store firewood, scrap lumber, wooden patio furniture or other combustible materials in this area.

Gravel Escrow

For all new structures in wildfire prone areas of Boulder County, rock must be installed around the structure **prior to the final inspections**. In some cases, though, this cannot easily be accomplished, mainly in the wintertime, when the ground is frozen and/or there is a significant amount of snow accumulation around the structure. Whenever possible, rock should be installed **before the arrival of winter conditions**. If this absolutely cannot be done, if the site is truly not accessible to landscaping work, and the structure needs its final inspections (for issuance of a C/O for instance), it may be possible to escrow installation of the rock.

Under the following specific circumstances, escrow for installation or rock around the structure may be submitted, subject to the same conditions as for revegetation escrow (see Revegetation Escrow handout for more information about how to do this).

- Snow accumulation on the ground 6" or greater.
- Ground is frozen solid, and extensive grading and/or retaining wall work is needed to create terraces to hold the remaining rock in place.

In addition to submitting a check for 115% of the work, the rockwork must be complete by no later than **June 1st** of the same calendar year (prior to the start of fire season). Note that the escrow amount must be approved by the Wildfire Mitigation Specialist prior to submittal, and an inspection will be required for return of the escrow once the work is complete.

Examples of Gravel Around a Structure



Example 1: Gravel under and around a deck.



Example 2: Gravel around a house with edging.



Example 3: Using large rocks to create a stone terrace.