



HOME HARDENING

Zen and the Art of Gravelscaping

altadenafiresafe.org

Our Mission

The **Altadena Fire Safe Council** is working to reduce wildfire risk across our community through GIS-informed planning, science-based integrated vegetation management and regenerative land stewardship. We will pursue Firewise USA® neighborhood recognition by educating our community about home hardening, defensible space design, soil restoration and native plant landscaping.



Charity On Top (EIN #81-1198370) is a California-registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation and is the official fiscal sponsor for the Altadena Fire Safe Council.

Equipment & Safety Disclaimer

The products featured on this site and pdf are provided for educational and informational purposes only. Altadena Fire Safe Council is not affiliated with or endorsed by any manufacturer listed unless explicitly stated. Product specifications, availability, and performance may change without notice. Users are responsible for reviewing manufacturer instructions, safety warnings, and regulatory requirements before purchase or use. Certain equipment — including generators, fuel-powered devices, respirators, and radio communication devices — may require training, proper ventilation, or licensing.

Some radios (e.g., Baofeng UV-5R) operate on licensed frequencies regulated by the FCC. Users are responsible for obtaining any required licenses and following all federal, state, and local regulations. Improper use can result in fines, interference with emergency communications, or other penalties.

Preparedness recommendations on this site and pdf are general in nature and are not a substitute for professional advice, official emergency guidance, or manufacturer instructions. In an emergency, always follow directions from local authorities.

For more information on FCC regulations for amateur radio, visit: **FCC – Amateur Radio Service ([fcc.gov/licensing](https://www.fcc.gov/licensing))**

How five distinct architectural styles use gravel—and California native plants—to create beauty, rhythm, and natural fire resilience.



Gravel is having a renaissance.

Once seen as purely functional, it has evolved into one of the most elegant, climate-savvy materials in contemporary landscape design. In fire-prone regions like California, gravel does more than add texture and structure—it actively supports defensible space by acting as a non-combustible groundcover that slows or stops ember spread. When paired with California native plants chosen for their lower fuel loads, higher moisture content, and graceful forms, gravelscaping becomes a beautiful strategy for creating gardens that are both artful and naturally fire-resilient. From sun-drenched courtyards to modernist retreats, these four styles show how gravel and natives can work in harmony.



Spanish Revival: Courtyards with a Fire-Resilient Edge

Spanish Revival landscapes rely on romance—arched corridors, bright tile, citrus, and vines. Gravel brings a timeless courtyard feel while offering a non-combustible ground plane ideal for fire districts across California. Using warm-toned gravel—sienna, adobe, or golden buff—creates a soft counterpoint to stucco and terracotta. Layer in fire-resilient California natives with Mediterranean affinities, and the design remains authentic while becoming safer.

Why it works: Spanish Revival landscapes often rely on open courtyards; gravel enhances permeability and ambiance while reducing fuels that embers can ignite.



Encelia californica
(California sunflower) to echo
Spanish golden tones



Rhamnus californica
'Eve Case' (coffeeberry) for evergreen
structure



Toyon (Heteromeles arbutifolia)
A quintessential California shrub with
traditional, ornamental appeal



Cleveland sage (Salvia clevelandii)
For fragrance and soft purple bloom spikes



English Cottage Charm: Soft Romance and Smart Defensible Space

English cottage gardens in California often translate into lush, layered borders—but choosing native perennials and framing pathways with gravel adds resilience without losing charm. Gravel underfoot creates meandering paths that weave through spilling flowers. Its permeability helps water filter into the soil while inherently offering defensible spacing between plant clusters. The look remains romantic, but the structure becomes safer.

Why it works: Grouped native perennials surrounded by swaths of gravel create natural breaks that help slow fire spread while maintaining that classic cottage informality.



Penstemon heterophyllus
'Margarita BOP' for bright blue
floral clouds



Heuchera maxima
For shade edges and soft texture



Eriogonum giganteum
(St. Catherine's lace) for floating cream
umbels and habitat value



Diplacus aurantiacus
(Sticky monkeyflower) for vibrant touches of
gold and orange



Midcentury Modern: Minimalist Geometry Meets Climate-Smart Structure

Gravel is practically a design language in Midcentury landscapes—clean, muted, and grounding. Add in sculptural California natives, and the aesthetic becomes even stronger while reinforcing fire-wise spacing. Monochrome fields of gravel allow architectural plants to take center stage. In high-fire zones, this open layout doubles as strategic separation between plantings, reducing continuous fuel pathways.

Why it works: The expressive, sculptural nature of native structural plants beautifully complements Midcentury architecture while the gravel matrix provides defensible negative space without sacrificing design purity.



Agave shawii
(Native to Baja/SoCal region) for
strong silhouettes



Juncus patens
Clean vertical lines and moisture-holding
foliage



Muhlenbergia rigens
(Deer grass) used sparingly to retain
spacing



Echinocactus
(Barrel Cactus) as a dramatic focal plant



Craftsman Style: Honest Materials, Handcrafted Detail, and Fire-Wise Gravelscaping

Craftsman homes, with their low-pitched roofs, deep eaves, exposed rafters, and welcoming front porches, are rooted in an ethic of honesty—materials expressed plainly, landscapes designed to feel grounded and human-scaled. A fire-wise gravel garden complements this philosophy beautifully, offering a naturalistic yet intentional approach that feels both historically appropriate and climate-responsive.

Why it works: In a Craftsman setting, gravel becomes a unifying base layer rather than a stark design statement. Soft, earth-toned crushed stone or decomposed granite echoes river rock foundations and stone porch piers, creating a visually cohesive transition from house to garden. Unlike bark mulch, gravel establishes a non-combustible zone around the home, reducing ember ignition risk while still feeling warm and organic.



Salvia apiana
(White sage) and *Salvia mellifera* for
structure and scent



Artemisia californica
'Montara' for its soft, silver foliage and low
fuel profile



Ceanothus
'Yankee Point' as a ground-hugging, glossy evergreen shrub with
excellent fire-wise attributes



Mediterranean Warmth: Rustic Luxury with Fire-Smart Flair

Mediterranean landscapes thrive on sun, stone, and aromatic foliage—all elements that align seamlessly with California's own climate. Adding native plants strengthens both ecological value and fire resilience. Gravel—usually warm decomposed granite or honey-toned pea gravel—forms pathways, dining courts, and shaded terraces where water scarcity and ember resistance go hand in hand. Its mineral tones echo olive trunks and limestone walls while reducing the need for mulches that might carry embers.

Why it works: Gravel cools the soil, supports drainage, and creates ember-resistant zones around deeply drought-adapted natives—perfect for properties with Mediterranean architecture in fire-risk areas.



Manzanita

The soul of a gravel garden; sculptural trunks and evergreen leaves..



California fuchsia

Late-season color and pollinator value with a relaxed, cottage-adjacent feel.



Sedum spathulifolium

A low, silvery ground layer for cooler edges and shade transitions.



Blue grama (Bouteloua gracilis)

A subtle, fine-textured grass that blends beautifully into gravel matrices.

Gravel as a Unifying Fire-Wise Material



Across all five architectural styles, gravel functions as the quiet hero—absorbing sound, defining space, and reducing ignition risk. In California, where defensible space guidelines increasingly shape how we garden, gravel provides a beautiful buffer around foundation zones, trees, and shrubs. Pairing gravel with native plants delivers a design-forward approach to resilience. Natives bring biodiversity, water savings, and seasonal character; gravel brings order, calm, and protection. The result: landscapes that honor local ecology, architectural heritage, and the realities of living with wildfire—without sacrificing beauty.

Native Plant Nursery Resources

Artemisia Nursery
Hahamongna Native Plant Nursery
Hardy Californians
(order online for pickup)
Los Nogales Nursery
Plant Material
Theodore Payne Nursery
Walqaqsh California native seeds
(online store for seeds)

Online Educational Resources

Calscape
calscape.org

Sustainable Defensible Space
defensiblespace.org

California Native Plant Society
cnps.org