



Fire Pit Plantings

By C.L. Fornari

When landscaping around a fire pit, think of using different layers of plants that provide beauty and fragrance in the area. Here are tips for getting the maximum pleasure from your fire pit.

- Plant the floor of the fire pit area with thyme so you can enjoy its herbal fragrance as you gather around the fire. Varieties that are the lowest growing include woolly thyme (*Thymus pseudolanuginous*) Doretta Klaber thyme, (*Thymus praecox* 'Doretta Klaber') and white thyme (*Thymus praecox* 'Albiflorus') All of these varieties will tolerate light foot traffic, but you'll give them the best chance of survival and spreading if you plant them up against the pit and to the sides and rear of chairs.
- Ring your fire pit area with low-growing fragrance. Commonly called summersweet because of the fragrance in July and August, hummingbird clethra (*Clethra alnifolia* 'Hummingbird') can sweetly define the perimeter of a garden without blocking the breezes. This plant has the added advantages of golden fall colored foliage and seeds for the birds.
- Other shrubs for fragrance in the area: Azalea 'Lemon Drop,' mock orange, taller Clethra, Bloomerang Lilac, 'Korean Spice' Viburnum. Tree: sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)
- Lavender is an attractive and fragrant plant for near a fire pit that's in full sun. Or grow *Actaea* 'Brunette' (aka *Cimicifuga*) in part-sun or part-shade. It flowers in August and September.
- Annuals for fragrance include alyssum, purple petunias, and most *Nicotiana* (flowering tobacco), Heliotrope, and scented geraniums (*Pelargoniums*).
- For scented smoke, grow sage (*Salvia officinalis* Zones 4-8) or similar aromatic herbs near the fire pit and toss sprigs on the coals as they die down.
- Plant pots with Lemon Verbena (fragrant foliage) and Meyer Lemon (flowers and fruit).
- Use a cover on top of the fire pit to protect the bowl from rainfall and to create a table when a fire isn't burning. There will be evenings when you might not want to build a fire but will enjoy gathering around the circle in the evening without flames. A cover provides table space for food and drinks at any time of day.
- Avoid ornamental grasses near your fire pit, especially if you will use it in the fall.
- Include plants with green and white variegated foliage, and those with white flowers. These show up as the evening grows darker. A firepit garden is the new moon garden!