Gardening — *Le débroussaillage pour tous*

How to avoid huge fines and protect your home from forest fires?

*Débroussailler…!*

With the summer fire season soon upon us, it is incumbent of homeowners in France to ensure that any brush or tall vegetation around their homes or even in empty parcels of land that they own is cleared away, especially if they live in the southern parts of the country where forest fires are most frequent. Failure to do so can not only put your property and family at risk, but can result in some rather heavy fines.

A law dating from 2003, and that has been further reinforced since, makes it mandatory for homeowners in almost every department in France to clear the brush and undergrowth from around their houses and other buildings. Both the mayor and the prefect in the department have the authority to set the limits on the zones that need to be cleared, but for the most part it is 50 metres from any building, although the mayor can, if he deems it necessary, increase it to 100 metres. Any property owner who fails to *débroussailler* can be cited by the mayor, who has the authority to order the work done, either by city crews or professional, private firms, all at the expense of the property owner, AND he can also level a punitive fine of 30 euros per square metre on top of that. It really wouldn’t pay not to take care of this task on your own. Homeowners should also be aware that failure to clear the vegetation from around their homes can also result in their insurance companies raising the deductible for their protection against fires to 5,000 euros!

There are some specific guidelines as to what has to be removed and what can be left standing, which can vary slightly from one department to the next, but in general you must remove all the tall grass and bushes in the prescribed zones and even some trees must be pruned to a certain height, especially if their crowns are within a certain distance from any dwelling. It is permissible to use chemical herbicides to kill low-lying vegetation, although this method is highly frowned on by environmentalists. Even if you did use a herbicide, you would still have to remove the dead vegetation afterward. The best method is surely to use some kind of mechanical means to cut and clear the vegetation, which can either be stacked on site and burned or else taken to the local refuse dump. Your local *mairie*, fire department or *préfecture*, or their respective websites*, can always provide you with more detailed information that is specific to your own community and/or department.

It’s always more enjoyable to tackle such tasks in the company of friends and family. So pick a sunny, dry day, call the troops in and make it a sort of *débroussaillage* party. But, to ensure that your loyal friends will agree to come back again next year, be sure and ply them with some cold beer – with moderation, of course –, lemonade or even a meal at the end of the day.

*Roger Stevenson*

*To find the website of your prefecture:  
www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_l_interieur/les_prefectures/votre_prefecture*
A Few Useful Words

Here’s some helpful vocabulary for this often laborious but necessary chore:

Débroussailler = to clear away brush and undergrowth
Une débroussaileuse thermique/électrique = a gas/electric powered weedeater
Le sous-bois = undergrowth
Un buisson = a bush
Un arbuste = a small shrub
Élaguer = to trim or prune trees
Déchets = waste, refuse
La déchetterie = the refuse dump
Les outils de jardin = garden tools
Une serpe = a billhook
Un sécateur = pruning shears
Une fourche = a pitchfork
Un râteau = a rake
Un incendie/feu de forêt = a forest fire
Un feu de broussaille = a bush fire
Un risque d’incendie = a risk of fire
Prendre feu = to catch fire
Appeler les pompiers = to call the firemen (Number 18)
Obligatoire = mandatory
Une obligation = an obligation
La franchise = deductible for an insurance policy
Une amende/un p.v. (procès-verbal) = a fine

Forthcoming Gardening and/or Organic Events

Just a few of the numerous events which feature a particular plant, fruit or vegetable and which take place all over the country:

21-22 June: Naturel’Monts, salon du développement durable, de l’éco habitat et du marché bio (organic gardening is at the centre of this event, with 50 stands, an organic food market and other products, habitat, etc). Palais des Congrès. Saint-Jean-de-Monts (Vendée).
www.saint-jean-de-monts.com/content.cfm?id=549

21-22 June: Journées botaniques (mainly a book fair on plants but also a flower market, and the occasion to visit the wonderful botanical garden of the Jaïsinia). In the village. Samoëns (Haute-Savoie).
www.samoens.com/franceete/DT1210749985/page/Journees-Botaniques.html

21-22 June: Été de la vannerie et des métiers d’art (art market with around 15 basket makers and 20 other handicraft artists). In the tree nursery called Les Jardins d’Adoué. Lay St-Christophe (Meurthe-et-Moselle).
www.jardin-adoue.com

5-6 July: Foire bio (one of the most important organic fairs in the Isère department, with 120
producers, and a mini-farm for kids). In the village. Meaudre (Isère).
www.meaudre.com

5-6 July: Planète en fête (an environmental fair, with more than 100 stands, and an organic market). In a special space close to the city, with access by shuttle bus, foot or bike. Pommerieux (Mayenne).

10-14 July: Melons en fête (melon festival in the city which is the main producer of this fruit in France, with market, tastings, folklore, election of the best melon, etc.). In the city. Cavaillon (Vaucluse).
www.cavaillon-luberon.fr

18-19 July: Fête éco-bio, Voir et vivre la nature (about 30 stands on organic agriculture products, recycling, habitat, organic gardening, with attractions such as fishing, gardening workshop, and games). Maison de la nature. Le château d’Oléron (Charente-Maritime).
www.oleron-maison-nature.org/ecobio/ecobio.php

2-3 August: Foire bio (small organic fair, supposed to be mainly on habitat and environment). Espace nautique, Lanveoc (Finistère). No website. Contact: sylvain.reynouard@orange.fr

16-17 August: Fête de la bio et du naturel (more than 100 stands of organic producers: food and other products). In the centre of the village. Correns (Var).
www.correns.fr/manifestations.asp?Mois=8

30-31 August: Salon bio Gascogne (organic food, well-being, environment, textiles…, with conferences on nature and on organic wine). In the centre of the city. Condom (Gers).
www.biogascogne.fr

30-31 August: Foire bio (one of the oldest organic fairs in France, with 100 stands of handicraft artists, wine and food producers, etc). In the village. Neuvy St-Sépulchre (Indre).

Fêtes de la lavande

Throughout the summer, many lavender fairs or festivals take place all over Provence.

There are too many to detail them, but a list is reproduced on the following web-site: www.leportaildesantiquaires.com/index.asp?ID=1482