

Windbreaks can make or break winter

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Bone-chilling cold weather is upon us. It wasn't that long ago when we were sweltering in summer heat. Such are the "joys" of our Nebraska climate. We can't do much about these normal temperature extremes. However, we can modify the environment in and around homes to make conditions more tolerable throughout the year.

Well-designed tree and shrub plantings can reduce home heating and cooling costs, reduce maintenance, and control snow drifting. Windbreak plans should take into consideration the site-specific need for protections and beautification.

Windbreaks are an important asset to our farmsteads and to the landscape. It takes many years of hard work to successfully establish and achieve the benefits of a windbreak. Benefits may include farmstead or livestock protection, wildlife cover, or add aesthetics in the landscape.

There are several key items that can help in the establishment of an effective windbreak. They include:

- Start the planning process for your windbreak early. The process can take up to a year or longer to properly plan and prepare a windbreak site. It is important to avoid areas that have buried or overhead utilities.
- Prepare the planting site at least 12 months prior to planting trees. This is especially true if the planting site is in sod. Initial tillage should be to a depth of at least 12 inches. Subsequent tillage can be completed at a shallower depth. Keep the site free of weeds. In erosion susceptible areas, a cover crop may need to be planted.
- Select tree and shrubs adapted to the planting site and for the intended purpose. Avoid trees that need special care or are susceptible to pests and disease.
- Plant trees only under favorable conditions. Avoid hot, windy days. Keep roots of plants damp during planting and don't plant into frozen soil. Root slurry is helpful in maintaining root moisture during planting.
- Plant trees at the proper depth into firm, moist soil.
- Water trees after planting to help remove air pockets and maintain root zone moisture.
- Control weeds by using weed moisture barrier, mechanical, or chemical methods. Weed pressure reduces available moisture and limits tree growth. Follow all chemical label requirements.
- Follow-up maintenance is very important. Dead or diseased trees need to be removed and replaced with healthy trees.
- Although not guaranteed, the success of all properly planned and prepared tree planting sites significantly increases the establishment success of your windbreak planting.

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