VEGETATIVE WINDBREAKS MAKE EXCELLENT HOME INSULATORS

By Donald Hanley, Extension Forester, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID

A windbreak is a vegetative or mechanical barrier that is designed to reduce or eliminate undesirable effects of strong winds. Mechanical barriers, constructed of slats or narrow boards with about 50 percent density in the upper two-thirds of its height and 25 percent density in the lower third, will normally reduce open wind velocities by 40 to 60 percent on the lee side zone lying between 3 and 10 times the barrier's height.

The main advantage of mechanical barriers is that they require little space and no waiting period for protection. However, the main disadvantage to mechanical barriers is that they can not be constructed very tall. About 6-10 feet in height is the maximum practical height, especially where there are heavy snow loads. Vegetative barriers, on the other hand, often grow 60-70 feet in height depending on the species used.

Because of the severe limitation to mechanical barriers such as height, anchoring, and cost, the rest of my remarks will address vegetative barriers. Windbreaks, then, I will define as vegetative barriers.

There are two basic types of windbreaks depending on their location and what they are protecting. The first is a farmstead windbreak. A farmstead windbreak is used to protect the main farmhouse or outbuildings from winds and snow drifts. The second main type is a field windbreak designed to protect crops and livestock for increased yields and better performance.

Windbreak Benefits

Probably the single most important benefit of a farmstead windbreak is the reduction of energy required to heat a home. Recent studies (4) of windbreaks show that windbreaks can reduce winter fuel consumption by 10 to 30 percent. For example, one study in Nebraska compared the fuel requirements of identical test houses which maintained a constant inside temperature of 70°F. The house protected by a windbreak used 23 percent less fuel.

Two identical electrically heated homes in South Dakota were compared for energy usage. One was sheltered by a farmstead windbreak and the other was not. Inside temperatures were maintained at 70°F. The sheltered home used 34% less electricity—quite a sizeable savings in today's energy market.

In addition to reducing the force of the wind, windbreaks also can reduce the wind chill impact on people outside the house.

Studies of three-row windbreaks, where trees were 25 feet tall, show that wind velocities and the wind chill index were effectively reduced (Figure 1).

Energy savings can be further enhanced by the use of foundation plantings (Figure 2). Trees and shrubs planted closely to buildings reduce wind currents. These foundation plantings create a "dead air" space which slows the escape of heat from a building. Please notice that deciduous plantings are made on the south and southwest sides of the home to block the sun in the summer, but allow the warming rays in the winter to come through.







Figure 2

It has long been recognized that increased crop yields is a windbreak benefit. This data is variable, however. E. J. George (2) reports that a South Dakota study showed an increase in corn of 8-9 bushels per acre, while alfalfa increased ³/₄ ton per acre. In Idaho he reports potatoes increased by 80 bushels per acre. Some researchers attribute a portion of the yield increases to increased soil water penetration from snow drifts.

I have talked with numerous farmers in southern Idaho who have indicated to me that their crops "look better" in the leeward side of a windbreak. Unfortunately I know of no economic study that compares the benefits and costs of a windbreak.

Windbreaks provide improved habitat for small mammals and birds. A 1970 survey of 180 Idaho wind-Continues on page 30 break owners reported that over 30 percent of them were enthusiastic about the use of the trees by birds. The Idaho Fish and Game Department regularly plants windbreaks as nesting, brooding, and loafing areas for Chinese pheasants. The United States Forest Service is in the middle of a ten-year program to plant 75,000 Russian olive seedlings normally in southern Idaho on the Curlew National Grass Range for bird habitat. An excellent publication by Martel and Vohs (3), of Oregon State University, lists plants attractive to wildlife in the Pacific Northwest.

Windbreak Establishment

To survive and make satisfactory performance as a windbreak, young trees will need:

- 1. To be planted according to a sound plan.
- 2. A favorable climate and a suitable soil.
- 3. To be carefully handled and planted.
- 4. To have adequate moisture.
- 5. To be kept free of weeds.

6. To have protection from livestock and other damaging agents.

Windbreak planning is by far the most important step as the planning phase will determine the location, size (number of rows), tree spacing, and the tree species used.

In general, most settled areas below 5,000 feet elevation in this region have quite a favorable climate for growing windbreak trees. The lack of natural rainfall usually is not limiting because of modern irrigation practices.

However, a deep, well-drained loam soil with neutral pH and average fertility is ideal for growing a variety of trees. Species modifications will have to be made on sites with poor soils. In Idaho our major soil problems relate to iron, phosphorus, and zinc deficiencies, which are easily corrected with fertilization.

Location

Locate your windbreak at a right angle with the prevailing winds as nearly as possible. Figure 3 offers some suggestions on how windbreaks can be designed. Note how roadways cross the windbreak at nonperpendicular angles.

Place your windbreak about 100 feet from the house for maximum effectiveness. If you have considerable snow and wind in your locality, then locate your windbreak about 100-150 feet from buildings, driveways, or areas that need to stay free of drifts (Figure 4). A windbreak planted closer than 60 feet to the house or other main areas of the farmstead will be somewhat of a hindrance in snow country because of the deposition of the snow.



Figure 3

Extend your windbreak at each end 50 feet beyond the boundaries of the farmstead.

The location of a field windbreak will have to conform to maximum expected wind velocity, field boundaries, irrigation systems, power lines, roads, and soil type.

In this region, fields that are subject to severe wind erosion may require multiple-row planting along the windbreak border, supplemented by parallel singlerow plantings at intervals of 500 feet or less (Figure 5). The usual velocity of erosive winds in your locality and the nature of your soil will determine the best intervals to use between the supplemental plantings. If the usual maximum wind velocity in your locality exceeds 30 miles per hour and you have light soils, place the supplemental windbreaks 350 feet apart. Under less severe conditions, tall trees in single-row plantings spaced 600 feet to ¹/4-mile apart will give adequate protection.

Windbreak size (number of rows)

My recommendation on windbreak size is to establish a five row windbreak whenever possible (Figure 6). Most owners that are contemplating the establishment of a windbreak are doing so because they have a wind problem. Five rows give the best protection.

If limited space prevents your planting a five-row windbreak, then use fewer rows rather than crowding your trees. Crowding trees in a windbreak causes a loss of vigor due to severe competition among the trees as they grow to mature size. Crowded trees slow down in growth and stagnate—reach a point where they make almost no growth—at an early age. The planting becomes more susceptible to wind whipping injuries and losses from insects, diseases, and drought. Lower limbs die out early from too much shade in an over-



Figure 4



If you have room for only	SELECT	OR	SELECT
4 rows	Dense shrub Medium height evergreen Tall evergreen Medium height evergreen		Dense shrub Medium height deciduous Tall evergreen Medium height evergreen
3 rows	Dense shrub Tall evergreen Medium height evergreen	itestero and 1.33	Dense shrub Tall deciduous Medium height evergreen
2 rows	Medium height evergreen Tall evergreen		Dense shrub Tall evergreen
1 row	Medium height evergreen	1	Tall evergreen

crowded planting, thus making the windbreak much less effective. Three rows with room to develop will give better results than five rows that are seriously overcrowded. A well developed single row can be more satisfactory than three rows with inadequate growing space.

If you must use fewer than five rows, select the following combinations to give the maximum year-round protection for your site:

Please notice I do not recommend a one row deciduous windbreak for year-round protection, even though we see many, many one row lombardy poplar breaks. However, sometimes a tall lombardy poplar is alternated with a dense shrub such as caragana in a single row. I would recommend this arrangement only where evergreens do poorly and protection is needed mainly in the summer.

Tree Spacing

Spacings for windbreak trees vary by the type of tree and/or shrub used because it is very desirable to give trees room to reach mature size. Table 1 gives the minimum spacings recommended for windbreak trees. Wider spacing can be used with no disadvantage ex-Continues on page 32



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Table 1. Recommended minimum spacings for windbreak trees

Recommended minimum spacings						
	Irrigated or dryland with 16" or more precipitation.		Dryland plantings with 16" or less precipitation.			
Tree and Shrub types	Multiple- row windbreaks	Single- row wind- breaks	Multiple- row windbreaks	Single- row wind- breaks		
All types (between rows)	(feet) 16	(feet)	(feet) 20	(feet)		
Dense shrub	3	2	4	3		
Medium-size deciduous	9	6	10	8		
Tall deciduous	12	8	12	10		
Medium evergreen	9	6	10	8		
Tall evergreen	12	8	12	10		

cept that it will take longer to get full protection. I believe you will find these recommended distances appear to be quite large, especially if you are planting small 2-0 or 2-1 stock. Please remember these distances will be adequate for mature trees. Additionally, the spacings recommended between rows and between trees within rows will leave adequate room for use of your tillage equipment; provide your trees with ample room for good growth; avoid wind whipping damage to trees in adjacent rows; and prevent early dieback of the lower limbs. The question is often asked, "Why not plant at one half the tree spacing distance and then thin to the desired density when the strees start to compete with each other?" That is a good idea if you can get the landowner to thin. Oftentimes that is hard to do.

Tree species

The selection of a tree species must satisfy two basic requirements: 1) it must grow and block the wind and 2) it must be aesthetically pleasing to the owner. For these reasons and the variations in local environments, the following list of recommended species is minimal. On the other hand, all species listed have been field tested for many years. These species recommendations are taken from *Trees Against the Wind* (1).

If you have less than 16 inches of annual precipitation and you cannot provide supplemental watering, I recommend using Siberian peashrub, Russian olive, Siberian elm, black locust, ponderosa pine, and Austrian pine.

The most reliable species for high elevation plantings are Siberian peashrub, common lilac, golden willow, hybrid poplar, ponderosa pine, blue spruce, and Rocky Mountain juniper.

Evergreen trees can be called the foundation for windbreaks in all areas where they can be grown satisfactorily as they give year-round protection. They should be included in windbreaks wherever possible. In areas where they do well, evergreens may be used for the entire windbreak. However, a windbreak of mixed species gives some protection against insects or diseases damaging the entire planting.

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DENSE SHRUBS	Maturo	Crown	Minimum	Saline Soil	Winter Damage
NAME	Height	Width	Precipitation	Tolerance	Resistance
Siberian peashrub	(feet)	(feet)	(inches)		
Caragana arborescens	10	10	12	Excellent	Good
A dense, attractive, many-ste insect and disease free. Sprey years, on dryland in 10 to 12 y whole region. It is weakened	emmed shrub. Mal outs from crown o years. Can be trimr d by repeated 2, 4-	kes rapid growth. nly. Good for dry med to make an ex -D exposures.	Has long life, wide range land or irrigated plantin xcellent protective hedg	e of soil and elevation gs. Reaches full size e. A superior windbre	al adaptability. Generally on irrigated land in 5 to 7 ak shrub adaptable to the
Common lilac					
Syringa vulgaris	10	10	15	Good	Excellent
but spreads slowly. Makes e scale insects; extremely sen	xcellent hedge or nsitive to 2, 4-D. He	shrub row in wind as high resistance	and elevational adaptab dbreak. Has high aesthe e to drought and cold.	tic value. Occasional	ly becomes infested with
Tatarian honeysuckle					
Lonicera tatariea	8	7	15	Fair	Excellent
Attractive global-shaped, m wildlife food and cover. Not	nany stemmed shr commonly subject	rub. Bears numer at to insect or dise	rous pink or white flowe ease problems. Does we	ers. Red fruit holds o ell on most soils.	on till fall. Provides good
Common privet					
Ligustrum vulgare	10	8	15	Good	Good
An extremely dense, attract plant for low single-row win	ive shrub with me dbreaks, as well a	dium to rapid gro is the shrub row i	wth. Needs well-drained n multiple-row planting	d soil. Sprouts only fr s.	om crown. A nearly ideal
	Mature	Crown	Minimum	Saline Soil	Winter Damage
NAME	Height	Width	Precipitation	Tolerance	Resistance
Nanking cherry	(feet)	(feet)	(inches)	all man in the second	and the second for second
Prunus tomentosa	6	4	15	Fair	Good

An attractive upright shrub with a fast growth rate. Produces abundant edible fruit that makes good jelly. Fruit is retained throughout the winter and makes good wildlife food. Some hybrid varieties grow to 10 feet tall. Has fair to good windbreak qualities. No known insect or disease problems. Nanking cherry should not be planted near cherry orchards because it is an alternate host to Western X cherry disease.

Table 2. Recommended windbreak species

 Peking Cotoneaster
 Similar to Nanking cherry. Will grow on severe sites. Moderate growth rate. Withstands drought well. Produces abundant fruit that is retained throughout the winter. An excellent species for adding wildlife value to a windbreak. Few insect or disease problems.

Mugo pine

 Pinus mugo
 8
 8
 20
 Fair
 Fair

 An attractive, compact evergreen shrub with moderate growth rate. Does best on fertile, well-drained soils. Performs best as a wind-break shrub at elevations below 4,500 feet as winter burning is a problem over this elevation.
 Fair
 Fair

DECIDUOUS TREES

 Russian-olive
 20
 12
 Excellent
 Excellent

 A small tree with dense, attractive crown. A superior tree for windbreak, wildlife, and aesthetic values and for drought resistance. Makes a dense hedge when clipped. Its spiny-tipped twigs make a dense planting an almost impenetrable barrier. Considered to be one of the best deciduous species for dryland plantings in the region. Makes very rapid growth especially on good soil with ample moisture. It is adapted to a wide range of soils. Sprouting is negligible, but it spreads by seed where there is adequate soil moisture. More resistant to spray damage than other deciduous species, but not as resistant as evergreens.

Golden willow

Salix alba var. vitellina353015GoodExcellentA medium-size tree with good growth form for windbreak use. Bright yellow to orange colored young branches make it attractive in
winter. Makes very rapid growth; has wide adaptability to soil and moisture conditions. Sprouts only from crown and does not spread
from runners. Subject to severe damage from scale insects and aphids. Should be used in dryland plantings only if supplemental mois-
ture is available. Excellent in the Palouse.

NAME	Height	Width	Precipitation	Tolerance	Resistance
Black willow	(feet)	(feet)	(inches)		
Salix nigra	40	35	20	Excellent	Excellent
Grows very rapidly under irr level. Serves well as a middle Has performed well in local damage by scale insects.	igation. Forms bro row in windbreak ities with salty soi	oad, global crown s. Not very suitab Is and high water	that is moderately dense le for single row planting tables where establishr	e. Usually has several is because of its low w nent of other species	stems from near ground vide spreading branches. was difficult. Subject to
Black locust					
Robinia pseudoacacia Has rapid growth rate. Form not stand waterlogging. Se injured roots produce thick Suckering is not serious on shade, aesthetic, and wildlift	50 s moderately dens Idom damaged by ets of sprouts. Co dryland. Requires te values.	40 se crown. Tolerate insects or diseas nfine black locus s little maintenan	15 es very hot climates. Ada se. Not recommended for t between other rows of ce once it is established	Fair pts to a wide range of or ditch bank or fence f trees to prevent spre I. A well-liked and wid	Fair soil conditions, but does e row plantings because eading on irrigated land. dely used tree with good
Honevlocust					
Gleditsia triacanthos var. ind Medium to tall tree. Fairly d inch thorns. Fruit is a large	ermis 40 rought resistant. V 12" (max.) pod. W	20 Vithstands alkalir 'inter injury on ha	12 ne soils well. Attractive z irsh sites.	Good tigzag twigs, fine text	Fair ured leaflets. Two to four
Siberian elm					
Ulmus pumila	50	30	12	Excellent	Good

Has moderately dense crown and attractive form. Makes rapid growth. Adapted to a wide range of conditions. Branches usually become brittle in irrigated plantings. This often results in breakage and an untidy appearance. Pruning can reduce this. Sprouting is not a problem, but thickets of seedlings often form around irrigated plantings. Severely damaged from repeated exposure to herbicides applied as crop sprays. Sudden fall freezes can cause severe damage. Susceptible to scale insects. Very drought resistant but has not stood up well in Oregon and Columbia Basin. A very acceptable dryland tree in Idaho up to 5,000 feet. (Note: Chinese elm. *U. Parvifolia* is quite similar.) Resistant to Dutch elm disease.

Hybrid poplar

Populus x spp.503015GoodExcellentMakes very rapid growth. Has dense crown and good form. Does best under irrigation, but performs well in dryland plantings with 15"
or more annual precipitation. Provides quick protection. Suckers from injured roots. Do not plant near field drains or along irrigation
ditches. A well liked tree that is growing in popularity. Susceptible to poplar and willow borer. (Note: There are many hybrid poplars.)The one described here is a selection that was made from early Idaho test plantings of hybrid poplars.)

NAME	Mature Height	Crown Width	Minimum Precipitation	Saline Soil Tolerance	Winter Damage Resistance
Green ash	(feet)	(feet)	(inches)		
Fraxinus pennsylvanica var.					
lanceolata	60	40	15	Good	Good
A deep rooted, long lived tree becoming established. It will close to them. Sprouting is ne than black locust. It is damag aphids.	e with dense, sym become overtopp ggligible. An exce led by herbicide s	metrical and attr bed by more rapic llent tree for ditch sprays, but is mor	active crown. Growth m fly growing trees, such a bank and fence row pla e resistant than Siberiar	ay be slow at first, bu as black locust and Si ntings. It is more wint n elm. Subject to dam	ut moderate to rapid after berian elm, if planted too ter hardy and salt tolerant hage by scale insects and

Lombardy poplar					
Populus nigra var. italica Grows very rapidly, reaching middle row where fast growth have been damaged by toppi	70 40 feet in 12 years and extra windbr ng, fire, or other ca	15 s under favorable eak height are des auses. Windfirm u	20 conditions. Has very na sired. Subject to some ca nless diseased. Suscept	Good rrow, though fairly de anker diseases and he ible to poplar and will	Excellent ense, crown. Makes good eart rot, especially if trees ow borer. Competes with
nearby crops for soil moistu	re and nutrients. S	short lived.			
EVERGREENS					
Rocky Mountain juniper					
Juniperus scopulorum	20	15	12	Excellent	Excellent
Makes medium to rapid grov superior small windbreak tre lished. Subject to damage b	wth. Forms very de te for this region. E y spider mites and	ense, symmetrica Bare-rooted plant I is sometimes a h	l crown. Adapted to wide ing stock is difficult to en nost to cedar-apple rust	e soil variations. Tole stablish on dryland, b	erates high water table. A but does well once estab-
Fastern redcedar or Virginia	iuniper				
Juninerus virginiana	25	15	15	Good	Good
Has moderate to fast growth except on very dry sites and planted near apple orchards	rate. Similar in ap at high elevations	pearance to Rock . Well liked for sin	y Mountain Juniper and Igle row screens. Subjec	generally as adaptab t to attack by cedar-	ble. It is easily established apple rust. Should not be
Northern white cedar					
Thuja occidentalis	35	20	20	Good	Good
Moderate growth rate. Forma row in a multiple-row plantin Has not been widely used, b screens and windbreaks.	s very dense, attrac ng. Survives well u ut existing plantir	ctive crown. Hold nder irrigation wl ngs indicate it is a	s lower branches well. M here soils are not highly good tree for many loca	akes a dense single-r saline. No known ins alities. It is well liked	row windbreak or leeward sect or disease problems. in Oregon for single-row
	Mature	Crown	Minimum	Saline Soil	Winter Damage
NAME	Height	Width	Precipitation	Tolerance	Resistance
Austrian pine	(feet)	(feet)	(inches)	State Second States	Band marked designed (17)
Pinus nigra	40	30	20	Fair	Good
Has medium growth rate. De pine is equivalent to that of t some dryland plantings with annual precipitation, it need	evelops symmetric wo rows of ponder low rainfall after 10 s a deep, fertile so	cal crown that is v rosa pine. Holds lo 0 to 12 years. If pla il with good moist	ery dense for a pine. Sor ower branches well. An e inted without supplement ture holding capacity. A	me maintain the dens excellent tree under i ntal watering in locali ustrian pine is consid	ity of one row of Austrian rrigation, but has failed in ties with less than 20-inch ered an excellent species





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for the Columbia Basin. Ponderosa pine is preferred in Wasco, Gilliam, Sherman, and Morrow counties, Oregon. Usually remains free of insect and disease problems. Susceptile to iron chlorosis.

Scotch pinePinus sylvestris402015FairGoodHas rapid growth rate. Crown density is usually medium. Lower branches shade out and die if they do not get full sunlight. Adapts to a
wide variety of soil conditions. Will withstand permanently moist soil conditions better than ponderosa. Generally easy to establish. A
widely used tree for windbreaks. There are many strains of Scotch pine. Some have poor form. Spanish burgo variety does well in
Idaho.

 Blue spruce
 Picea pungens var. glauca
 40
 25
 20
 Good
 Excellent

 Growth rate is unusually slow for first 5 years after planting but has medium growth rate after that. Crown is very dense with attractive pyramidal form. Makes an excellent windbreak species in most of the region. Color varies from green to blue. Sometimes it is difficult to establish. Subject to damage by spider mites, scale insects, and spruce gall aphid.

Norway spruce

Picea abies var. bavaria602516FairFairMakes rapid growth. Develops a very dense crown that extends to the ground unless the base of the crown is in heavy shade. Moisture
and soil fertility requirements are higher than for the pines. Does fairly well in dryland plantings if soil is deep and fertile. Subject to
spider mite and and spruce bud scale damage. Sometimes becomes stunted in growth due to zinc deficiency.

 Ponderosa pine
 Fair
 Good

 Pinus ponderosa
 60
 30
 15
 Fair
 Good

 Has moderate growth rate. Crown is symmetrical and fairly dense. Needs full sunlight for best development so lower branches shade out and die under close spacing. Adapts well to a variety of soil conditions but must have good drainage. Withstands hot, dry sites well. Can be damaged or killed by too much irrigation. Generally free of insect and disease problems. Considered by many to be the most reliable evergreen for windbreaks. Highly preferred in Oregon and in much of the Columbia Basin.

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