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EC1700 Revised 1938 Garden Windbreaks

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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

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U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

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GARDEN WINDBREAKS

Few people fully appreciate the great need of some kind of protection against south and west winds in order to grow gardens most successfully in Nebraska. Winds dry out the soil quickly and hasten transpiration of moisture through the leaves and also cause considerable mechanical injury to young plants. Hot winds too often burn and injure vegetation even though there is not a shortage of moisture in the soil.

Anything which helps to conserve soil moisture is a distinct benefit in this state where moisture is the limiting factor in crop production. Windbreaks reduce wind velocity and consequently lessen evaporation of moisture and actually makes rainfall go farther. A windbreak gives good protection for a distance of approximately 10 times its height and some protection for even a greater distance. A small garden 40 or 50 feet square may be benefited materially by fastening strips of burlap to the fence or weaving cornstalks, willows or other branches close together in woven wire fence on the south and west sides of the area. A picket snow fence erected on the north and west during winter to stop snow on the garden and then extended along the south side during the spring and summer will be very beneficial.

Two or three rows of corn or a row of castor beans planted along the south and west sides of the garden will provide some protection during the summer. Protection early in the season is, however, important enough to justify a permanent planting of trees or shrubs for this purpose. Most large trees sap moisture to such a distance that it will be impractical to use them especially where the garden is small and ground is limited. If room permits, a single row of red cedar planted 6 to 8 feet apart will, in a few years, give splendid protection. Cedar should, however, not be planted in commercial apple growing districts. The caragana, or Siberian pea tree is one that is very good for protecting gardens. It is an upright growing tree which reaches a maximum height of about 20 feet. This tree planted 20 to 24 inches apart will, in a few years, make a dense hedge which occupies a minimum amount of ground and will not sap the soil of moisture for so great a distance as will large trees like elms, ash, and cottonwood. Peach and apricot trees might also be considered for plantings of this kind at least in the southeast quarter of the state. Their bloom adds much beauty to the surroundings and in the more favored section may occasionally produce some fruit. They can be easily grown from seed. The pits should be planted about 2 inches deep in the fall. A single row with trees 8 to 10 feet apart headed rather low will in a few years make an attractive and an effective garden windbreak.

There are many shrubs that are hardy and will attain sufficient height to give the necessary protection. Unless one objects too strenuously to its sprouting habit, our common chokecherry will make an ideal garden windbreak. A single row planted two feet apart will in a few years, form a good barrier against damaging winds. It will not only provide wind protection but will furnish fruit for the table. Juneberry and buffaloberry are also hardy native shrubs suitable for garden windbreaks and which also produce edible fruit.

To be revised

Other shrubs suitable for garden protection are Spirea Van Houtte, wild currant, cotoneaster, tamarix, lilac (Persian), false indigo, artemisia (old man), honey suckle, and Hugonis rose. These are attractive and hardy shrubs which are all common to the nursery trade and therefore, readily obtainable. A rather close spacing (2 to 5 feet in the row) is advisable for shrubs of this kind.

Transplanting of trees and shrubs should be done in the spring while the plants are still dormant. It is preferable to plow or spade the ground in the fall and then plant as soon as the ground can be worked in the spring. The trees and shrubs should be planted with the soil packed solidly about the roots and then watered well. They should be given thorough cultivation for a few years to keep out all weeds and grass and to conserve moisture.

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