Plan Now…Order Soon…Plant Later…

When we think planting, we typically think spring. While spring works for many crops or plants, trees are one planting that needs advance planning. If you’ve ever considered a windbreak, the time for planning isn’t late spring or during the first winter cold snap. It’s now.

The wind chill with a temperature of 10 degrees and a 15 miles per hour wind is negative 18 degrees. That 10-degree temperature feels 28 degrees colder than it actually is. The same combination of temperature and wind behind an established windbreak: seven degrees. Just three degrees cooler feeling than the actual air temperature and 25 degrees warmer than being in the wind directly. That difference would make outdoor work a lot nicer and life outside for pets and livestock a lot easier. It can also help reduce home heating fuel costs by 15 to 25 percent.

Because they are a long-term investment, windbreaks must be designed to ensure the desired benefits to homes, livestock, and fields. Make a sketch of your site and potential locations, giving consideration to the following design principles:

Wind eddies will form around the ends of a windbreak. To avoid, extend windbreaks at least 100 feet beyond the area to be protected.

Gaps will funnel wind and reduce effectiveness. Locate driveways around the ends of windbreaks or situated at an angle perpendicular to prevailing winds to prevent this funneling.

Windbreaks are more attractive following the land’s natural contour. Rows don’t have to be straight in one direction, but should be generally perpendicular to the prevailing winds.

Avoid plantings where the windbreak will block a driver’s vision at intersections. Don’t make plantings closer than 200 feet north or west and 80 feet south or east of the centerline of a road to prevent creating snow drifts across the road.

Think diversity of species. This will increase insect and disease resistance as well as wildlife habitat. However, you shouldn’t mix species within the row unless in a specially designed wildlife habitat planting. Plants of the different species grow at different rates and suppression of slower growing species may be seen.


After the design, you’ll need trees. Next week we’ll talk about the Kansas Forest Service Conservation Tree and Shrub sales program.