

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Protect your garden from the wind

Many of us have already started planting our warm season crops. However, Kansas weather has thrown us many curveballs recently, and you may notice that your garden is struggling to stay healthy with high winds and storms. In Kansas, annual wind speeds average between 11 to 14 miles per hour around the state, with stronger, gusting winds regularly occurring. While established plants can often withstand this, vegetable seedlings emerge and new transplants may need additional protection from strong winds. Even plants hardened off before transplanting can be broken, twisted, or snapped off by strong winds.

Since this is often an issue that occurs every spring, you can consider planting a windbreak. During the growing season, winds prevail mostly from the South. Consider placing wind breaks on the South side of plants for the most wind protection. Local wind conditions may vary however, as winds are funneled between or swirl around buildings and other objects in the landscape. So you may need to adjust the placement of your windbreak based on local topography.

Fences and hedgerows can also serve as effective long-term windbreaks, protecting crops from prevailing winds. Temporary windbreaks can also be created using wooden shingles, or large plastic bottles, such as a milk jug or 2-liter soda bottle with both the bottom and top cut off. Push the jug or bottle into the soil far enough so it will not blow away. Use wooden dowels or metal rods to secure objects in windy conditions.

In addition to protecting plants from physical damage, windbreaks can have many other positive benefits on fruit and vegetable plants, including through improved water management, increased yield and quality, and earlier crop maturity. In fact, University of Nebraska research found that melon yields were 70% greater in sheltered fields than fields with no wind protection. They also found bell pepper plants with wind protection produced nearly five times as many flowers per plant in just 30 days after transplanting.

While the extra work of creating wind protection for your garden may seem tedious, in the long run it can improve your harvests and prevent your crops from dying early in the season.