

Goal is to plant 1.7 million trees each year

Windbreaks around homes conserve energy, provide snow control, improve working and recreational conditions, enhance wildlife, provide visual screening and dust control, protect livestock, and can increase production of some crop and food products, according to Jim Brandle, Professor of Forestry with the University of NE-Lincoln.

Well designed windbreaks can reduce home heating and cooling cost by 20 to 40 percent, depending on the site, climatic conditions, construction of the home and living habits, according to Brandle.

Windbreaks reduce the force of the wind on the exterior surfaces of buildings thus reducing the amount of cold or hot air entering the home, he added.

Windbreaks can control drifting snow on driveways, service areas and around buildings saving time and energy in having to move snow out of the way. Windbreaks can also make outside chores more tolerable. A moderately-dense windbreak can reduce a 20 mph wind to about 5 mph out to a distance of five times the height of the windbreak.

“It can still be cold but working is more tolerable and less dangerous,” said the forester.

In the summer, gardens planted in the sheltered zone of a windbreak can improve the yield and quality of fruits and vegetables by lowering damaging wind speeds and moderating the ‘microclimate’ from the windbreak. Family barbecues or children playing outside are more comfortable behind the shelter of trees, added Brandle.

Trees can improve sound and air quality, too. All the tree trunks, leaves, needles, twigs and smaller branches can deflect sound and dust particles that can carry odor. Plus these trees can provide desirable sounds like the rustling of leaves or singing birds.

“Planting trees doesn’t necessarily mean a loss of potential income from the land. Walnut, oak and pecan trees can be grown in many areas. Planting fruit trees or decorative woody florals on the downwind side can be harvested for the homeowner or resale. Windbreaks provide an excellent environment for a honey bee operation with pollinators for fruits and vegetables and honey for home use or sale,” said Brandle.

But Brandle cautioned that removal of wood products from a windbreak requires careful management to maintain the wind protection and he encouraged landowners to seek advice from a forester.

Free assistance on designing or planting a windbreak is available at any Natural Resources District or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office.