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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Windbreaks, Hedges, and Screens

By Mary Davis, WSU Ferry County Extension Master Gardener

The best time to plant a windbreak was 20 years ago—the next best time to begin is today!

~Anonymous

A 'windbreak' is something that provides shelter or protection from the wind. A 'hedge' is a row of closely planted small trees, bushes, or shrubs. A 'screen' surrounds or protects something from sight. Riparian buffers protect stream banks. Regardless of which word you use or your definition, if you want plants for protection you can use the huge variety available to design by height, width, color and texture. For the purpose of this article, I will usually use the word hedge.



On larger parcels, a row of Hogan cedars (*Thuja plicata* 'Hogan') will provide year-round screening and noise reduction. This western red cedar cultivar grows to 40 ft in height, 20 ft in width, and is hardy to Zone 5. Photo by Charles Brun, WSU

There are additional benefits to using a living screen as opposed to a wall of wood, brick, or other hardscape. A living wall provides a buffer for wind and dust, noise, sight, and intrusion. It conserves energy, improves air quality, and provides living space for beneficial birds, insects, and small animals. In the planning stage you will need to consider the space requirements. How big an area is available to you? Create a simple measured map of your yard. Include existing plants, power lines, water lines, water sources, buildings, etc. On your map, shade in the area you are considering using for your hedge. You will need to measure the height and width and match that to estimated mature plant height and width. Another factor to consider is the planting area to provide adequate root soil volume. Consider if you have water or sewer lines running through your proposed root zone. These may become compromised if you choose large trees. Property lines may also be a factor. Your mature plant clearance should not extend into your neighbor's yard without permission. Consider all the activities that your new planting might impact. Do you want it to appear to be a formal planting or an informal design? Do you want evergreen or deciduous? The last few years have shown us the importance of planning for wildfire and a defensible space for our homes. These factors will affect your plant choices.

During your search for the proper plant selection, consider native plants, drought tolerant, bee and bird friendly plants. The time available to you for maintenance may be more important than the time it takes to prepare to plant. Consider if the plants you select will need pruning and how much water they will need once they are established. Consider what you are going to block out. Do you need something tall to block a bright street light, or shorter to filter noise? Do you want groundcover or mulch to control weeds that might filter into your planting?

Young trees and shrubs will need some protection from chewing animals and deer until they are a height and age to survive. You may initially need a temporary fence around your new planting. Consider during your plant selection if it is deer resistant. I've found over the years that nothing is deer proof! A tree will die just as fast by having its young bark rubbed off when a little buck is cleaning his new antlers as it will by having the top eaten off. Drought tolerance will be a big consideration if the hedge you are planting is a distance from a faucet. A drip irrigation system will work well with a young hedge planting, but the means to water the plants must exist. If you are planting where there will be no water available, take note of what already grows in the area you are augmenting. Native plants are your best choice in that case.

When choosing your plants you should consider the climate zone you live in. There are good zone maps on the internet and books in the library on gardening that will include a map of your area. Ferry County is primarily Zone 5a and 5b in which the average low temperatures reach -20 to -10 degrees. The climate zone is an indication of the limit of the lower temperature range that a plant will have to live in. Another factor is elevation. Certain nut trees will grow in our zone and fit the description of being beneficial to birds and small animals, however, at higher elevations they will live, but not bear nuts. When you're looking to design your hedge, your surroundings are a good indication of plants that will live in your area.

Good luck and have fun designing, planting, and growing your living windbreaks, hedges and screens!

Some great resources to help you are:

WSU Extension publication 'Selecting Plants for Screens and Hedges' (Home Garden Series) by Charles Brun, located at: <https://pubs.wsu.edu>.

'Trees against the Wind', Donald P. Hanley, PhD, CF, WSU Extension Forester, at <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/pnw0005/pnw0005.pdf>

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