Windbreaks in Texas

"The only thing blocking the wind between Canada and Texas is a four wire fence."

Many a farmer or rancher in West Texas has made that statement referring to the persistent winds that blow in the late winter and spring.

During the 30's and 40's the old Soil Conservation Service (SCS) recognizing a need to help lessen soil erosion by blowing winds, started working with land owners to establish large multi-row field windbreaks. During those early years landowners planted whatever they could get. If it was thought to be adapted to the area then it was planted.

It's a different story today. Through cooperative work between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (formally the SCS), the Texas Forest Service and various Soil and Water Conservation Districts the selection and availability of trees suitable for windbreaks has become a science and not just grabbing what's available. Today when a land manager seeks information on how to establish a windbreaks, what to plant, and how to manage and care for their investment they're able to visit there local Soil and Water Conservation District office and gain the information they desire.

_____, NRCS District Conservationist at _____
said, that a windbreak will not only lessen the force of the wind around an open field helping to protect crops but when planted around a home or farmstead a windbreak can assist in heating and cooling cost, and provide a habitat for wildlife.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Plant Material Center (PMC) at Knox City Texas has been working since 1983 to identify and select suitable trees and shrubs for use in windbreaks in Texas.

Morris Houck, PMC Manager at Knox City stated that although a lot of traditional windbreak trees like eastern red cedar and Arizona cypress were looked at, several selections that had not been previously evaluated like Afghanistan pine, bur oak, little walnut and Nanking cherry were considered. Overall the PMC looked at 35 evergreen collections, 186 hardwood tree collections, and 50 shrub collections over a 20 year period. All the different plants were evaluated for their hardiness, shape, growth rate and general adaptability to local conditions. The PMC used sites at Pampa, Levelland, Texline, and Knox City, Texas to test the different collections.

Today many new and improved windbreak management procedures have been adopted, including the use of single row windbreaks instead of large multi row plantings. Fact sheets on the selection of plants, windbreak design, and care and maintenance have also been developed and are available from NRCS field offices.

Today landowners don't have worry about where to buy tree seedlings. Through efforts of the Texas Forest Service's West Texas Tree Nursery at Lubbock, many of the most adapted windbreak trees and shrubs are available. Landowners can purchase seedlings directly from the Texas Forest Service or from many Soil and Water Conservation District offices.

If you as a landowner, homeowner, or someone who just like trees around the place are interested in learning more about windbreaks contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District office, an NRCS Field Office, or the Texas Forest Service's West Texas Tree Nursery at Lubbock, Texas.

Morris J Houck, Manager
Knox City Plant Materials Center
Knox City, TX