

WINDBREAKS AND SCREENING OPTIONS

Probably the single most common question we hear is “which trees are good for a wind break or line of sight break”. There are a number of good options listed below. But each situation is different – so if you have any questions please let us know.

A good windbreak will reduce wind speeds by 90% within the first 100 yards. Obviously nothing ever grows as quickly as anybody would like. A good conifer windbreak will take 5-7 years to realize benefits. A windbreak/living snow fence with deciduous bushes will be more like 3-4 years.

SPRUCES

The spruces are probably the #1 option for windbreaks. The Norway Spruce is our favorite and best large evergreen for windbreaks in the eastern 2/3 of America, and in much of the world in the proper climate. The Norway's are the fastest growing spruce and do well in all climates and almost all soil types. If it's a wetter location then look towards the White Spruce as an alternative. We plant a lot of White Spruce on our private land which is a heavier/wet clay and they do very well. You can use the Colorado Blue Spruce, but it isn't our top pick. Colorado Blue's do not like to be near other trees, so as they grow up they lose their bottom branches and needs. The Norway's and White's do not have that issue. All of the Spruces will eventually get to 60-80' tall or more.

Top Options:

- Norway Spruce
- White Spruce
- Black Hills Spruce

PINES & FIRS

All of the pines and firs can also be used as windbreak trees. The White Pine grows just as quickly as the Norway Spruce. The pines and firs as a general rule like better drained/sandier soil than the spruces. When you think of Firs you normally think XMAS trees – but they do make an excellent windbreak as well. You just have to wait a little bit longer. Red Pine isn't our favorite option because of it's spare branching and tendency to lose bottom branches as it ages.

Top Options:

- White Pine
- Austrian Pine
- Balsam Fir
- Douglas Fir

ARBORVITAE & CEDARS

The Cedars (especially the white cedar) are also excellent windbreak trees. They grow tall, dense, and wide. We have a few rows of them on our private land and we plant them 10' apart – that lets them grow together in about 5 years or so. If you intend to use Arborvitae please ensure you check the zone they will thrive in. Certain varieties of Arborvitae like the 'Green Giant' are heavily marketed due to their fast growth – but they do not thrive in Central WI or north. We hate to see people wasting their money on these just because they were sold “fast growth”

Top Options:

- Canadian Hemlock
- American Arborvitae
- Techny Arborvitae
- Dark Green Arborvitae

DECIDUOUS

Deciduous trees lose their leaves in the winter, so they aren't a premier windbreak tree. Because they grow much faster than the conifers listed above though, many people do plant a row of faster growing deciduous trees as well. They should be the row furthest from the sun to not inhibit growth of the conifer rows. Popular varieties here are the Hybrid Poplar and Hybrid Willows. Some people also like to do a first row of Red Osier Dogwood to catch any snow. We love the Hybrid Poplar option. The Hybrid Willows are super fast growing, but tend to be messy as well. They work great for deer plots and for lining fields, but are not our favorite for your yard.

Top Options:

- Hybrid Poplar
- Hybrid Willow
- Red Osier Dogwood
- Flame Willow
- Elderberry
- Nanking Cherry
- Lilacs

PLANTING TECHNIQUES

The most efficient planting for a **windbreak** is two (or more) rows of trees planted in a **staggered** pattern, like footprints you leave in the snow. Plant your first row, then the next row should be planted between the first line of trees but of course some distance away. ... The rows of trees should be 12 or 14 feet apart.

