



**Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
**CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**  
**WINDBREAK/SHELTERBELT ESTABLISHMENT**  
**CODE 380**  
**(ft)**

**DEFINITION**

Windbreaks or shelterbelts are single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs in linear configurations.

**PURPOSE**

This practice is used to accomplish one or more of the following purposes—

- Reduce soil erosion from wind
- Protect plants from wind related damage
- Alter the microenvironment for enhancing plant growth
- Manage snow deposition
- Provide shelter for structures, animals, and people
- Enhance wildlife habitat
- Provide noise screens
- Provide visual screens
- Improve air quality by reducing and intercepting air borne particulate matter, chemicals and odors
- Delineate property and field boundaries
- Improve irrigation efficiency
- Increase carbon storage in biomass and soils
- Reduce energy use

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

Apply this practice on any areas where linear plantings of woody plants are desired and suited for controlling wind, noise, and visual resources. Use other tree/shrub practices when wind, noise and visual problems are not concerns.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

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The location, layout and density of the planting will accomplish the purpose and function intended within a 20-year period.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species; it must not contribute to erosion and it must be appropriate for the site. Refer to Tree/Shrub Site Preparation Standard 490, for preparing site conditions for plant establishment.

The maximum design height (H) for the windbreak or shelterbelt shall be the expected height of the tallest row of trees or shrubs at age 20 for the given site.

Only viable, high quality and adapted planting stock or seed may be used. Species must be adapted to the soils, climate and site conditions.

No plants on the Federal or state noxious weeds list shall be planted.

Spacing between individual plants shall be based on the needed growing space for plant type and species, the accommodation of maintenance equipment, and the desired characteristics of the stem(s), branches and canopy as required for a specific purpose.

The windbreak will be oriented as close to perpendicular to the troublesome wind as possible where wind related issues are the concern (this might not apply for plantings intended to be visual or noise screens). West and southwest winds are the predominant winds in Ohio. However, property lines, other windbreaks, tillage operations, field layout and natural features on the landscape should be taken into account in the design. When taking these situations into account, the windbreak can be designed to be oriented on the most beneficial side even though these are not perpendicular to the prevailing wind.

The length of the windbreak will be sufficient to protect the site including consideration for the “end effect” and changes in wind direction.

Avoid planting trees or shrubs where they will interfere with structures and above or below ground utilities.

1. Where subsurface drains (tile lines) cross through a hardwood windbreak, sealed conduit should be installed a minimum of 100 feet from rows of large spreading trees and 75 feet from small to medium sized trees and shrubs. Conifers normally do not interfere with drains but invading native tree species can interfere.
2. Tree and shrub rows are to 8 feet or more from fences, utility lines, property lines, legal drains and roads. An exception may be made where adjoining landowners agree to establish windbreaks on the property line.
3. To prevent snowdrift problems the leading edge of a windbreak on the north or west side of a road will be no closer than 75' from the edge of the road. Where these specifications differ from State or County regulations, the State or County regulations will be followed if more restrictive.
4. The windward row of the windbreak will not be closer than 75 feet to the windward side of any building, road, feedlot, or area where snow drifts are not acceptable. Where the landowner has made the decision the drifting snow can be tolerated, plans shall include a explanation of drifting snow and icing hazards.

Moisture conservation or supplemental watering shall be provided for plant establishment and growth where natural precipitation is too low for the selected species.

Refer to Appendix B in Ohio EFOTG, Section IV for information on suitable plants, plant spacing, species characteristics and planting methods.

Refer to Tree/Shrub Establishment Standard 612 for further guidance on planting trees and shrubs.

#### **Additional Criteria to Reduce Wind Erosion and Protect Growing Plants**

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The interval between windbreaks shall be determined using current, approved, wind erosion technology. Interval widths shall not exceed that permitted by the soil loss tolerance (T), or other planned soil loss objective. Calculations shall account for the effects of other practices in the conservation management system.

For wind erosion control, temporary measures will be installed to supplement the windbreak until it is fully functional.

Sites, fields, and plants are protected within an area 10 times the design height (H) on the leeward side and two times the design height (H) on the windward side of the windbreak.

Select species that are taller than the crops being protected.

#### **Additional Criteria to Manage Snow Deposition**

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The windbreak will be oriented as close to perpendicular to the snow-bearing wind as possible.

For snow distribution across a field, the windbreak density (during expected snow-producing months) shall not be less than 25 percent or greater than 50 percent. The interval between barriers will not exceed 20H.

For snow accumulation, the minimum barrier density, during expected snow-producing months, will be 50 percent.

The length of the windbreak will extend beyond the area being protected to allow for end drifts.

Windbreaks will be located so that snow deposition will not pose a health or safety problem, management constraints, or obstruct human, livestock or vehicular traffic.

Where water erosion and/or runoff from melting snow is a hazard, it shall be controlled by supporting practices.

#### **Additional Criteria to Provide Shelter for Structures, Livestock and People**

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For wind protection, the minimum barrier density will be 65 percent during the months of most troublesome wind.

The area to be protected will fall within a leeward distance of 10H.

Drainage of snowmelt from the windbreak shall not flow across the livestock area. Drainage of livestock waste from the livestock area shall not flow into the windbreak.

#### **Additional Criteria for Noise Screens**

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Noise screens shall be at least 65 percent dense during the time of the year when noise is a problem, as tall as, and as close to the noise source as practicable.

The length of the noise screen shall be twice as long as the distance from the noise source to the receiver.

For high-speed traffic noise, the barrier shall not be less than 65 feet wide. For moderate speed traffic noise, the barrier width shall not be less than 20 feet wide.

Species selected will be tolerant to noxious emissions, sand, gravel depositions or salt spray from traffic areas.

**Additional Criteria for Visual Screens**

Visual screens shall be located as close to the observer as possible with a density, height and width to sufficiently block the view between the area of concern and the sensitive area.

**Additional Criteria to Improve Air Quality by Reducing and Intercepting Airborne Particulate Matter, Chemicals and Odors**

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The windbreak interval shall be less than or equal to 10h depending on site conditions and related supporting conservation practices.

Windbreak density on the windward side of the problem source, (i.e. particulate, chemical or odor) shall be greater than 50% to reduce the airflow into the source area.

Windbreak density on the leeward side of the problem source, and windward of the area to be protected, shall be greater than 65%.

Select and maintain tree and shrub species with foliar and structural characteristics to optimize interception, adsorption and absorption of airborne chemicals or odors.

**Additional Criteria for Increasing Carbon Storage in Biomass and Soils**

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Maximize width and length of the windbreak to fit the site.

For optimal carbon sequestration, select plants that have higher rates of sequestration in biomass and soils.

Plant and manage the appropriate plant spacing for the site that will maximize above and below ground biomass production. Plantings will be done at the tightest planting spacing acceptable for the species.

Minimize soil disturbance during establishment and maintenance of the windbreak/shelterbelt.

**Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat**

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Plant species selection shall benefit targeted wildlife species including pollinators. Plants shall provide appropriate food or cover as needed.

Design dimensions of the planting shall be adequate for targeted wildlife species.

**Additional Criteria for Improving Irrigation Efficiency**

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For sprinkler irrigation systems, the windbreak shall be taller than the spray height.

The windbreak shall not interfere with the operation of the irrigation system.

### **Additional Criteria to Reduce Energy Use**

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Orient the windbreak as close to perpendicular to the troublesome wind as possible.

Use proper plant density to meet energy reduction needs.

Use plants with a potential height growth that will be taller than the structure or facility being protected.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Consider enhancing aesthetics by using evergreen species or species with features such as showy flowers, brilliant fall foliage, or persistent colorful fruits.

When designing and locating a windbreak or shelterbelt, consider the impact upon the landowner's or public's view of the landscape.

Selection of plants for use in windbreaks should favor species or varieties tolerant to herbicides used in the area.

Plants that may be alternate hosts to undesirable pests should be avoided. All plantings should complement natural features.

Tree or shrub rows should be oriented on or near the contour where water erosion is a concern. Where water erosion and/or runoff from melting snow is a hazard, it should be controlled by supporting practices.

Wildlife and pollinator needs should be considered when selecting or siting tree or shrub species. Species diversity, including use of native species, should be considered.

Species diversity, including use of native species, should be considered to avoid loss of function due to species-specific pests.

Consider the invasive potential when selecting plant species.

Windbreaks for odor and chemical control increase in effectiveness as the amount of foliage available for intercept increases. Multiple-row, wide plantings offer greater interception potential than do smaller plantings.

When using trees and shrubs for greenhouse gas reductions, prediction of carbon sequestration rates should be made using current, approved carbon sequestration modeling technology.

A shelterbelt can be used as a travel corridor to connect existing patches of wildlife habitat.

In cropping systems select windbreak and shelterbelt species that minimize adverse affects to crop growth (e.g. shade, allelopathy, competing root systems or root sprouts).

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

At a minimum, the plan shall include planting dates, planting methods, species to be planted, plant spacing, number of plants needed and the planting location.

## OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance).

Replacement of dead trees or shrubs will be continued until the windbreak/shelterbelt is functional. Supplemental water will be provided as needed.

Thin or prune the windbreak/shelterbelt to maintain its function.

Inspect trees and shrubs periodically and protect from adverse impacts including insects, diseases or competing vegetation. The trees or shrubs will also be protected from fire, spray drift and damage from livestock and wildlife.

Periodic applications of nutrients may be needed to maintain plant vigor.

## REFERENCES

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