



Gimme a (wind) break! Part 2

by Marilyn Loser

2018 March 14

In Part 1 I discussed wind break concepts. If you missed the February 28 Courier article you can view it on the News & Blog tab at AlamosaTrees.net website. This column will address windbreaks in relation to urban yards. As discussed previously, living windbreaks are more effect than wall since they actually absorb the wind as well as deflect it.

What are your goals? Do you want to reduce your winter heat bills, cool your home in summer, protect a flower garden, provide wildlife habitat, and/or have a (relatively) wind free patio?

It is important to carefully plan any windbreak elements for your yard. A living windbreak isn't something you stick in the ground one year and reap the benefits thereafter. Trees and shrubs can take a long time to become established and mature, especially given Alamosa's short growing season.

You need to look at house orientation and lot size. You also need to consider existing elements such as neighboring buildings, trees, and hardscape (walls, powerlines, driveways, walks, and streets).

In Alamosa, winds mostly come from the south west. What is the orientation of you house in relation to wind and trees? For example, we have solar collecting windows on the south side of our home. The low winter sun provides us with a lot of heat – we don't want trees shading these windows.

On the other hand, in the summer when the sun is high, it is wonderful to shade east, and especially west facing windows for protection from the scorching heat. A number of years ago, we planted a green ash tree about 10 ft. west of our two-story home. It was perfect for a long time – it allowed afternoon winter sun to heat the porch and upper story window and shaded the west side in the summer. Unfortunately, it turned out not to be the right tree in the right spot. We didn't think it would get so large! It outgrew the space and began interfering with the power lines coming into our home. If I had it to do over, I would still plant a deciduous tree in the spot, but a tree that would be smaller when mature.

The larger your lot, the more control you have over breaking the wind. In downtown Alamosa most lots aren't very large. However, in this more established part of town there are a lot of mature trees that dampen the wind. Sadly, as trees age and are cut down or topped and not replaced, it will get windier in the area.

If your lot is small, even a few trees and some shrubs can cut down on the wind. For example, if your home faces south, you could plant deciduous and evergreen trees on the west along with some shrubs such junipers and lilacs. Avoid planting evergreen trees on the south if they will shade your house in winter as they mature.

Many homes in Alamosa are one story. If you don't want to plant regular trees for a wind break, consider planting shrub junipers or mugo pine. I have juniper shrubs that are now eight ft. high and a mugo pine that is 10 feet high. The area down wind of these is relatively still.

Evergreens, with their year-round foliage, make the best winter windbreaks. Consider species such as spruce, ponderosa, and juniper. They're popular because they're dense enough to stop most of the wind and because they have foliage that extends to the ground. Besides reducing the annoyance of the wind, they can reduce energy bills as less heat is stripped off of your home.

In summer, deciduous shade trees reduce wind and cool the yard. While not as effective as evergreens, deciduous trees also reduce the wind during the winter.

When you consider landscaping for your yard, thinking about wind reduction can provide benefits for many years in our windy city.

“What an irony it is that these living beings whose shade we sit in, whose fruit we eat, whose limbs we climb, whose roots we water, to whom most of us rarely give a second thought, are so poorly understood. We need to come, as soon as possible, to a profound understanding and appreciation for trees and forests and the vital role they play, for they are among our best allies in the uncertain future that is unfolding.”
Jim Robbins, “The Man Who Planted Trees: Lost Groves, Champion Trees, and an Urgent Plan to Save the Planet