Windbreaks, Hedgerows & Living Fences

Adding Biodiversity to the City
Want to protect your home or garden from the elements? Consider a windbreak, hedgerow or living fence.

Windbreaks
Just as trees are critical for providing shade on warm summer days, trees and shrubs can be placed strategically to offer protection from the wind in the cold winter months, when wind chills can lower temperatures drastically. A windbreak will reduce these impacts by cutting down on wind speed for a distance of as much as 10 times the windbreak’s height!

Keys to Placing Your Windbreak
Windbreaks planted on the north and west sides of a building can reduce heating costs by up to 30 percent. With some care you can reduce the winter heating requirements and reduce the amount of drifting snow.

- Use several rows (one to five) of plants to create depth in your windbreak. The wider the better.
- Plant your rows in a line perpendicular to the prevailing wind and upwind from the space or building you want to protect. Check with your local weather station to find out the direction of prevailing winds in your area.
- Design your windbreak as three parts: the windward, centre and leeward. The windward row is what the wind hits first and should be made up of dense, fast-growing trees and shrubs that prevent snow from piling up in the centre. This also helps to prevent moisture accumulation in the spring in areas where snow is trapped and not melted by the sun. The middle row should be made up of tall, fast-growing trees and shrubs that force winds to rise up over the windbreak. Finally, the leeward row should be made up of dense-growing trees and shrubs.
- Use both evergreen and deciduous species to provide a variety of food and shelter for wildlife.

Hedgerows and Living Fences
Hedgerows and living fences are rows of trees, shrubs and vines. They offer a more aesthetically pleasing alternative to standard chain link or wooden fences and provide wildlife habitat, visual screens and help define boundaries.
Tips for Selecting Species for Your Hedgerow or Living Fence

• Select fast-growing tree species, such as maple, willow, cedar, serviceberry and chokecherry, and dense shrub species, such as buffaloberry, dogwood and viburnums.

• Include spring-flowering shrubs and wildflowers; trees and shrubs with coloured berries; trees, shrubs and vines with fall colour; deciduous shrubs with coloured bark for winter interest; and shrubs that have seed pods throughout the winter for seasonal interest.

• Use vines, such as Virginia creeper, American bittersweet, wild grape, virgin’s bower and honeysuckle, as well as perennials that will climb along a fence, trellis or wall.

• Use native roses and dense shrubs spaced in double rows to create nesting habitat.

Clumps and Thickets

Clumps and thickets can provide shelter and wildlife habitat in small corners or sections of your site. Strategically place them to provide stopping places for wildlife between hedgerows, corridors or windbreaks.

• Cluster groups of small trees and shrubs, such as willow, viburnums and birch to create a clump.

• Use dense bushes, such as buffaloberry and dogwood, grown close together to create a thicket.

For More Information
