

Planting for the Future

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

There's an old saying that goes, "You don't plant trees for yourself, you plant them for the next generation." While there's a fair amount of truth in that, especially if planting something like a bur oak, I can also safely say that I've planted a lot of trees over the years that I have gained benefit from and am glad I did!

Planting a tree is an act of planning for the future. It may be for a windbreak or visual screening. It may be for shade so the hot sun of summer doesn't bake your front door on the west side of the house, or it may be fruit trees to bring you some fresh fruit. It may also be the planting of shrubs for butterflies and other pollinators or the planting of all sorts of trees and shrubs for birds and other wildlife.

Following the droughts of the 1930s and 1950s a lot of rural residents planted windbreaks (sometimes known as shelterbelts) to protect homes from cold winds in the winter and field windbreaks to help reduce wind erosion. But many of those field windbreaks were bulldozed and cleared to plant more acres to crops. New construction techniques and improved insulation made it easier to keep houses warm and cool. Windbreaks weren't planted around new rural residences and older residences watched the once stately trees start to die out with just random volunteer trees to replace them. We now know how important trees are for the climate, for wildlife, including many insect species, but really, important to the quality of life for the residents that live in those homes.

If you've purchased new shade trees for your home's landscape you know that these can often be a significant expense costing several hundred dollars for a nice sized shade tree. The thought of the cost of planting 25 or 50 or even 100 trees for a windbreak, a visual screen, a woodlot or simply for wildlife habitat could be scary. But there are options for those who are patient. When planting a windbreak you don't have to plant a two inch caliper ten foot tall tree like you did in your landscape. You can plant one or two year old seedlings which are smaller, granted, but they are also significantly cheaper. The amazing thing is that if you plant a seedling and take good care of it, water it and keep the lawnmower away from it, it won't take too many years until it has caught up with larger trees. Even many oak species, when given good care, can grow at a good rate.

The Kansas Forest Service sells seedling trees and shrubs. These seedlings are one or two years old and generally 12 to 24 inches tall. They are seedlings! They come in units of 25 of the same species - no mixing and matching. Bare root shrubs and trees are \$30 for 25 seedlings. You can also buy container grown evergreen trees that are \$65 for 25 seedlings. These have bigger root systems and generally get off to a better start. They also have wildlife and pollinator bundles that have a mix of several different species specifically suited for wildlife and pollinators.

They have a great selection of both trees and shrubs and most are native to the United States. The trees are shipped from Manhattan via UPS. You can pick up an order form at the Extension Office, 119 East 9th Street, Junction City, or you can order online at <https://www.kansasforests.org/>. I can help you select trees for your location and if interested in starting a windbreak for your rural residence I can visit with you on site to help plan it. There's no greater gift to future generations than to plant trees. Make 2021 the year you make a gift to tomorrow!