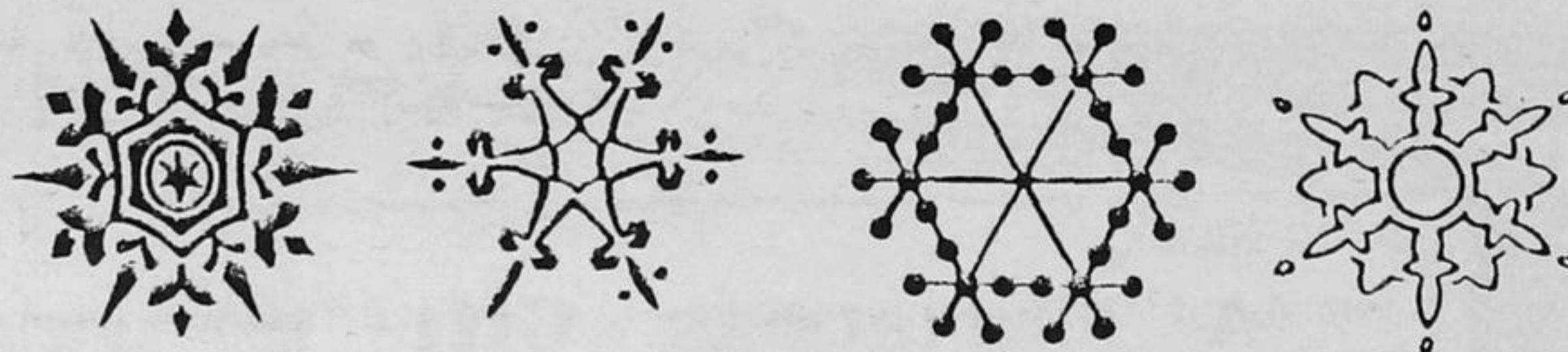


WINDBREAKS

A Good Farming Practice Today and Tomorrow
 In June of this year, the Third International Windbreak and Agroforestry Symposium was held at the Ridgetown College of Agricultural Technology. Delegates from around the world spoke on the value of windbreaks in agriculture. The recurring theme of the conference was the importance of windbreaks in the production of farm crops and their value in reducing soil erosion. Past farming practices in Eastern Ontario created areas of large, exposed fields to facilitate more efficient operations. These areas often stretch for several miles and are unbroken by any form of shelter. These are ideal conditions favouring the destructive forces of wind erosion. As everyone knows, soil is a basic building block of plant growth. Without productive soil, there can be no agriculture. Millions of dollars are spent each year in an attempt to improve soil quality, yet very little is done to retain soil in fields where it belongs. Many soils in Eastern Ontario are light, making them prime targets for extensive wind erosion. Field windbreaks can dramatically reduce wind speed, which will lessen the amount of soil erosion that occurs. In the past, those who had the foresight planted dense, multi-row windbreaks to help control wind erosion. Research conducted at the University of Guelph in 1988 has shown that the most effective field windbreaks are those that are a single row wide. Once established, these windbreaks provide a moderate reduction in wind speed while aiding in crop pollination and drying. A big concern when starting a windbreak has been the amount of space that it will remove from crop production. Planting a single row of trees between fields only removes about a five to six foot strip on either side of

the row from production. The benefits of the windbreak more than make up for the small loss in productive area. The benefits include: soil conservation, energy conservation, livestock performance, aesthetics and crop yield and quality. Starting a windbreak need not be difficult. Staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources are available to give advice on planning for a windbreak. The choice of trees for your windbreak will depend on the type of soil you have. Trees are available for a low cost from the MNR. The resource staff will prepare a plan outlining the work necessary to prepare the site for planting. Instruction on tree planting will also be provided. MNR will then detail the efforts needed to ensure that the seedlings grow weed-free. Weed control is essential during the first three to five years as weeds rob the seedlings of much needed water and nutrients. Planning for a windbreak should be carried out about a year prior to planting. The reasons for this are twofold. First, any site preparation (furlowing and/or chemical/mechanical weed control) should be done the fall before planting. Secondly, to ensure the desired species are available from the tree nursery, it is best to order the trees the year before planting. Recommended tree species for windbreak planting include: white cedar, norway spruce, white spruce and white pine. Spacing can vary, depending on the species, from three to six feet. A small investment in a windbreak may begin to pay for itself within a few years, and will continue to benefit your farm for years to come. This article was prepared by the Private Land Forestry Staff in the Brockville District. Information on this or any other Forestry topic is available from the District Office nearest you.



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