

About Trees: Grow your own barrier to heat-stealing winter winds

By Fred Morgan

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The right trees in the right location can provide protection from the cold winter winds that whistle around our homes.

A dense line of specifically selected plant material on the windward side of your home may not only provide a visual/privacy barrier year-round, but may also significantly diminish the heat loss from those winter winds.

If you have good sunlight on the west to north sides and the horizontal and vertical room for it, a row of Chinese weeping privet (*Ligustrum sinense pendula*) is a fine answer, both as a privacy and wind screen.

It may take three years or so to gain an effective height of 6-plus feet and characteristic density, but the plants will grow up and out, meshing together and making a full green canopy.

For a maintenance-free screen, you'll eventually need almost as much lateral space as you expect in vertical height. Weeping privet rows with lots of sun can grow to 12 feet.

Another thing I like about this plant, both as a visual and wind screen, is its habit of merging into what ultimately appears as one long integrated row of foliage. While it can be pruned, it is just as often allowed to grow freestyle with minimal maintenance. This allows it to take on the visual characteristic its name suggests.

A less-space-consuming but not quite as effective option may be Virginia and/or white pines. Do not be seduced by the slightly faster-growing loblolly. Although it starts out with great promise, the loblolly soon reaches heights that are far above eye level and eventually roof level with very little green needle left lower down to block the winds. Mature large loblollies are likely more of a winter hazard than a benefit, because the wood is so brittle and prone to breakage.

A third, though possibly more expensive near-full-sun option for 10- to 20-year functionality and with greater line-of-sight density than pines is arborvitae, *Cryptomeria Japonica* or wax myrtle. Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), especially the "Emerald," or other cultivars that resist winter discoloration are effective screens, but may require more maintenance.

Stay away from pear trees, unless you're an orchardist. While colorful with springtime's white blossoms, bacterial Fire Blight disease and mechanical/structural failure are

common and serious risks with many of these.

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