

Strategies for the Windy Season
Darrol Shillingburg - February 2010

Let the winds begin! Ready or not, sometime in February our seasonal west winds will begin to blow. So, what options do food gardeners have to reduce the winds impact in the garden during the early season when transplants and seedbeds are vulnerable to being battered and desiccated. Even though temperatures may be cool, plants can be water stressed high transpiration rates from young tissues and excessive evaporation at the soil surface. Managing microclimates successfully will reduce both plant stress and loss of soil moisture.

Mulch - Mulching your planting beds provides a shaded windbreak at the soil surface creating a moist microclimate. Remember that organic mulches cool and plastic mulches warm the soil and choose the mulch most appropriate to your seed germinating requirements.

Windbreaks - There are many ways to break the winds impact on small plants. Simple folded cardboard barriers stuck in the soil on the west side of transplants will increase transplanting success by reducing transpiration loss for a few days while root systems adjust to new conditions.

Plastic gallon jugs with the bottoms removed make excellent windbreaks and mini greenhouses. Be careful to provide adequate ventilation.

Row Covers - Fabric or open-weave row covers provide excellent protection for transplants and soil surfaces and allow adequate airflow at the same time. A middleweight fabric supported on metal or plastic hoops is easy to install and hold down in the wind. By tying each end to ground stakes the cover can be drawn tight, making it easier to hold down the sides. If possible, orient the row covers with the long axis on an east/west orientation for improved aerodynamics.

Inplanting - Planting on the lee side of perennial vegetation and transplanting into an established bed of taller plants can provide wind protection while transplants become established.

Beware of the Beet Leafhopper - They are out and mobile during the windy season. Row covers and barrier skirts will provide protection from leafhoppers and the wind for tomatoes and peppers.

This windy season be prepared to create beneficial microclimates to reduce wind and water stress and encourage strong growth in your food plants.

Good Gardening,

Darrol Shillingburg, Doña Ana Extension Master Gardener