

IN THE DIRT

We have squirrels getting into our bird feeders. We have added cayenne pepper to the seed, but it does not seem to help.

Adding pepper to the seed and then not having an alternative for the squirrels to choose will not help, they will just get used to eating spicy food! Have a site away from the bird food just for the squirrels that does not have pepper in it. You can also use porcupine wire to encompass the top of the feeder. Have your feeder 8 feet above the ground and 6 feet away from any tree or building, this should help to keep the critters away.

Red Fox

The red fox is commonly found throughout the entire state of Nebraska except for the driest parts of the Sand Hills where its populations are spotty. This small canid (or dog-like mammal) has a fine reddish dorsal pelage coupled with black tipped ears and snout that create stunning features. A grayish white underside with black socks and a long white tipped bushy tail top off the amazing appearance of this creature. With a sleek weight of only 8 -10 pounds, this animal is a stealthy hunter.

Rabbits make up a majority of their diet in most of Nebraska. Rodents such as voles, woodrats, pocket gophers, and muskrats are also common prey for them in Nebraska. Occasionally, when available, small ground-dwelling birds, insects, crayfish, carrion, and a few fruits are incorporated into their diet. Most prey is eaten at the site of capture, yet feeding of young and the hiding or caching of food items has been noted. If a red fox hides any food, it is commonly put into a shallow depression and then covered with soil and leaves.



Photos by Encyclopedia of Life, by Dave C. with Normality Relief, who has enjoyed watching them on his land.

The red fox prefers habitats that integrate different types of ecosystems that are adjacent to each other. These edge locations make excellent habitats for the species. One great example of an edge is where wooded areas meet up with wetland or creek communities. On the acreage, windbreaks combined with landscape shrubs and a pond create a fox paradise.

Most red foxes have a home range of 1 to 3 square miles. The boundaries of individual home ranges are marked by scent. Usually, a red fox only displays home range or territorial security close to a denning or nesting location. These defenses rarely involve any physical conflict.



American red fox in winter coat.
Image by Wikipedia.

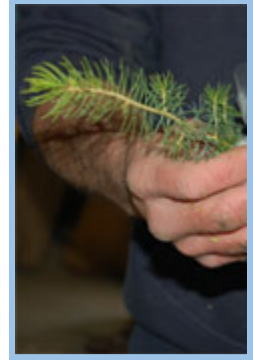
Dens may consist of hollow logs, brush piles, or culverts. Foxes frequently dig dens on sunny slopes. The dens are about 4 to 6 feet deep with two 8- to 10-inch diameter entrances.

The red fox commonly mates during the months of January or February in Nebraska. They only mate once per year. Young are born in March or April. The male fox will supply the female and pups with food for up to 7 or 8 weeks. At eight weeks of age the pups will begin hunting prey with the adults.

Source: *Dennis Ferraro, University of Nebraska Extension, writes about what he considers one of the most elegant-looking animals in the state.*

Time to Order Tree Seedlings for Spring Planting

Diseases, insects, drought and age have taken a toll on many windbreaks throughout Nebraska, resulting in the need for renovation or tree replacement. Late fall is a good time to assess your windbreak and order trees for spring planting. Most windbreaks, even those with a few gaps, can be renovated to maintain or enhance their effectiveness.



Windbreak Renovation

Windbreaks can have many purposes, such as enhancing habitat for wildlife, providing snow and wind protection, preventing soil erosion, reducing water runoff, or providing additional income. When renovating a windbreak, make sure the re-designed tree stand meets your goals.

Several publications are available from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu> and the Nebraska Forest Service at <http://nfs.unl.edu>. They will provide guidance to renovate and re-design your windbreak, getting it back into a healthy condition and provide benefits for years to come. Find the publications by typing 'windbreak'.

Purchasing Trees

Deciding on plant species and purchasing plants is the next critical step in the establishment of a windbreak. This is your best opportunity to avoid plant species susceptible to insect or disease problems. Key points to keep in mind when purchasing tree seedlings include:

- Purchase your stock from a reliable source. Bare-root windbreak tree seedlings are available through your local Natural Resource District office. November is the time Nebraska's NRD offices begin taking orders for windbreak seedlings to be delivered next spring. Over-the-counter tree sales are typically taken until March 1, 2015, or as long as supplies last. To find information about your local NRD Conservation Tree Program visit <http://www.nrdtrees.org/>.
- Bare-root tree and shrub seedlings can also be purchased from some nurseries. Your seedlings should come from nurseries using locally collected seed or seed from Northern origins. This ensures plants are well adapted to local growing conditions.
- Choose plant material that is suitable for your soils and can survive the environmental extremes of your site.
- Select insect and/or disease resistant plants whenever possible.
- Don't be too quick to buy the cheapest seedlings; they may not be the best value in the long run.

When ordering trees from your local NRD office, a minimum order of 25 seedlings is required; plant species are sold in bundles of 25 each. If 25 of one species is more than you need, then talk with your neighbors. Maybe you can place a joint order and split the bundles. Plants cost approximately \$0.90 cents each, plus tax and handling. You must pick up your tree seedlings when they arrive at the NRD office in spring.

Plant species commonly available through the NRD offices include the following.

- **Evergreen trees**- Eastern White and Ponderosa pine; Eastern red cedar; Colorado Blue, Norway and Black Hills spruce, and Concolor fir.
- **Deciduous trees**- Bur, Northern Red, Chinkapin and Swamp White oak; Black Cherry; Black Walnut; Bitternut hickory and Sugar maple.
- **Shrubs**- American plum; Hazelnut; Redosier dogwood; Chokecherry; Black chokeberry, Serviceberry; Elderberry; Common lilac; Amur maple; Skunkbush sumac.

Usually, windbreak seedlings are two years old and be 12-24 inches tall, with full, healthy root systems. Bare-root seedlings must be handled carefully to ensure good survivability and performance.

Source: Sarah Browning, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator