

# History of Arbor Day



Arbor Day is a nationally celebrated observance that encourages tree planting and tree care. The first Arbor Day was celebrated in the state of Nebraska in 1872, in response to a state proclamation urging settlers and homesteaders in that prairie state to plant trees that would provide shade, shelter, fruit, fuel, and beauty for residents of the largely treeless plains. On that first Arbor Day, more than one million trees were planted in Nebraska's communities and on its farms.

The Arbor Day idea was promoted by J. Sterling Morton, editor of the Nebraska City News who later helped the idea spread to neighboring states and eventually to all of the United States and many other nations.

Today, Arbor Day celebrations are held in communities all over America, with the date determined by the best tree planting times in each area. Celebrations are held as early as January and February in some southern states, and as late as May in more northern locations. National Arbor Day is observed on the last Friday in April.

The idea for Arbor Day originally came from Nebraska. A visit to Nebraska today wouldn't disclose that the state was once a treeless plain. Yet it was the lack of trees there that led to the founding of Arbor Day in the 1800's.

Among pioneers moving into the Nebraska Territory in 1854 was J. Sterling Morton from Detroit. He and his wife were lovers of nature, and the home they established in Nebraska was quickly planted with trees, shrubs and flowers.

Morton was a journalist and soon became editor of Nebraska's first newspaper. Given that forum, he spread agricultural information and his enthusiasm for trees to an equally enthusiastic audience. His fellow pioneers missed their trees. But, more importantly, trees were needed as windbreaks to keep soil in place, for fuel and building materials, and for shade from the hot sun.

Morton not only advocated tree planting by individuals in his articles and editorials, but he also encouraged civic organizations and groups to join in. His prominence in the area increased, and he became secretary of the Nebraska Territory, which provided another opportunity to stress the value of trees.

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*For more information, please contact the NADF at 402-474-5655 or visit: [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)*

