

## **Celebrate Arbor Day!!**

Arbor Day is the holiday Nebraska gave to the world. The first celebration of Arbor Day took place on April 10, 1872. The idea for Arbor Day originally came from a pioneer moving to Nebraska from Detroit, Michigan. His name was J. Sterling Morton. Upon arrival in Nebraska, his heart was dispirited from the lack of trees. He and his wife were nature lovers, and the home they established in Nebraska was quickly planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers. Morton was the editor of Nebraska's first newspaper. As an early proponent of forestation, he used this platform to promote "tree plantings" in cities and towns. He organized a contest in which the prize, "a farm library of twenty five dollars worth of books to the person who, on that day, shall plant properly, in Nebraska, the greatest number of trees." Nearly one million trees were planted that first Arbor Day. The winner on the prize was one J.D. Smith, who planted an unbelievable 35,500 trees in one day. In 1885 the Nebraska state legislature named Arbor Day a legal holiday and selected April 22, Morton's birthday, as the date for its permanent observance.

Today, all states memorialize Arbor Day by legislation, official proclamation, or public acclaim, although the dates vary according to local climate. Officially, the last Friday in April is celebrated as National Arbor Day. Arbor Day has now spread beyond the United States and is observed in many countries of the world. In some it is the king or queen who leads the national celebration, and in many countries exotic trees not suited to North America are planted in commemoration of the day.

Idaho celebrates Arbor Day on the last Friday in April, the traditionally accepted date. However many communities in Idaho choose to celebrate the holiday on different dates due to weather considerations or other factors. The Idaho Department of Lands, in cooperation with U.S. Bank, offers an Arbor Day grant to provide financial assistance to communities for celebrating the holiday. Additionally, an Arbor Day Poster Contest is administered in the state school districts to help Idaho children learn about the importance of trees to the community they live in.

J. Sterling Morton also originated the idea of using trees as memorials. He thought trees much superior to cold marble as memorials to persons or events. He said, "How much more enduring are the animate trees of our own planting."

The celebration of Arbor Day represents a priceless opportunity. Planting trees is an act of kindness and optimism. Trees purify our water and remove pollutants from our air. Additionally, they provide beauty for both the natural and constructed landscapes...shade to cool a sun-warmed brow...wind breaks that aid energy conservation...shelter and food for wildlife...they are essential for soil conservation in a windy place. J. Sterling Morton was proud of the success of Arbor Day and noted, "Other holidays repose upon the past. Arbor Day proposes for the future."

Another worthy quote: "Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets. To plant a pine, one only needs a shovel." Aldo Leopold