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FS 437

ARBOR DAY



Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U.S. Department of Agriculture

ARBOR DAY

By: Larry Helwig, Extension forester, and
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Arbor Day is the one day our country has set aside to commemorate the future instead of the past. Its observance, the planting of trees, is an aesthetic and economic investment in the future.

We should especially now be concerned about the future of trees in South Dakota, since Dutch Elm disease threatens to wipe out over 50 per cent of our state's shade tree population. Because of this threat and the concern to preserve a natural resource, the Arbor Days of the next five years are being dedicated to planting trees that will replace those lost American elms.

Old and young alike are encouraged to help in this effort that will mutually benefit everyone. We will all be making an investment in the future of South Dakota.

History

Arbor Day, which is strictly American in origin, grew out of conditions characteristic to the Great Plains. This area was practically treeless, and the lack of trees was a serious disappointment for the settlers.

The idea of Arbor Day originated and was first observed in our neighboring state of Nebraska in 1872. Under the leadership of its founder, Julius Sterling Morton, over a million trees were planted on the plains of Nebraska that first Arbor Day by the tree-loving pioneers. Since that time, the observance of Arbor Day has been adopted by every state in the nation, as well as several foreign countries.

Arbor Day was first observed in Dakota Territory in 1884. In 1947 the State Legislature established by law the last Friday in April as South Dakota's official Arbor Day. The same day also has been designated as National Arbor Day. Each year the Governor issues an appropriate proclamation concerning the observance of Arbor Day throughout the state.

In order to insure this enjoyment and resource for future generations, the present generation must be concerned enough about their future to plant, protect and preserve the trees of South Dakota. That's what Arbor Day is all about.

Observance

In the botanical sense, arbor is another word for tree. Likewise, arboriculture means tree care, and arboretum means a place set aside for growing and studying trees. So, Arbor Day is Tree Day or Tree Planting Day.

The goal of Arbor Day activities is to create an awareness of the values and benefits of trees to mankind and to stress the importance of every citizen doing his part to perpetuate and conserve this great natural resource.

In the past ten years, we have witnessed how a resource can be seriously threatened and partially lost. This is due to the combined attack of a small insect disease carrier, the elm bark beetle, and an even smaller fungus organism, *Ceratocystis ulmi*, that causes Dutch Elm disease (D.E.D.).

The southeastern quarter of South Dakota is rapidly approaching a 90-100 percent loss of American elm trees due to this fungus disease. The past practice of planting American elms too close together was a mistake, and it made it possible for D.E.D. to also spread through root grafting. With such a high percentage of the state's entire tree population being American elms, the loss is even more serious.

In planting Arbor Day trees to take the place of our lost American elms, we should learn from these two mistakes. **Do not overplant** one kind of tree, and **do not crowd trees** so close together that their branches and roots intertwine to provide for the easy and fast spread of a disease problem like D.E.D.

Benefits of an Arbor Day Tree Planting

The benefits of having an abundance of mature trees growing in South Dakota are many. Trees temper summer and winter winds that come "rolling down the plains," make our prairie terrain more picturesque, and provide shade, comfort and beauty for out-of-doors activities. Trees provide sanctuaries for wildlife, and provide food for humans, birds and other wildlife when they bear fruit. Trees produce lumber for building homes and provide wood-burning fuel. Tree planting, lumbering, and caring of

trees creates a job market for people trained in these disciplines.

Planning an Arbor Day Event

Arbor Day—or better yet an Arbor Week or Arbor Month—can be observed by everyone, young and old. Usually some concerned adult group or committee can plan the event to involve all segments of the population, and secure the necessary funds, materials and manpower to insure the success of the project.

Advance Arbor Day (week or month) planning is important. County Extension agents, Soil Conservation Service personnel, city parks superintendents, city foresters and arborists, and civic, social, business and professional groups interested in the preservation of our natural resources could help organize activities or assist in planning. The best plans are usually developed by a small committee who can delegate various assignments to be carried out, and select a chairman to coordinate the activities.

Contact a professional tree man (especially if you decide on an extensive project of one, two or five years) to help you make the best choices on deciding what type of trees to use for certain purposes and situations. The important thing to remember is to plan for and choose the kinds of trees you desire far enough in advance and order the trees early, so you are assured they will be available for Arbor Day.

Residents of your community will be interested in knowing about your Arbor Day tree-planting project. Contact all news media—radio, TV, and newspapers—early, so they can schedule their personnel to cover your newsworthy event. A committee member should be available to assist the newspeople and report on your Arbor Day project before, during and at the completion of your event.

Your Arbor Day program will be as innovative as the people organizing the event. Whether your program is traditional or contemporary, be sure it's enthusiastic. Arbor Day is a celebration of your faith in the future, a day you will want to be remembered by future generations.

"When we plant a tree, we are doing what we can to make our planet a more wholesome and happier dwelling-place for those who come after us, if not for ourselves."
Oliver Wendell Holmes

Suggested Arbor Day Projects

Community Beautification

All over America, communities are undertaking tree planting to beautify their environment. Planting boulevards, parks and malls are community beautification projects that might be initiated on Arbor Day. It may take several years to complete a project of this size, so plan accordingly. The ornamental crabs (*Malus hybrids*), the patented types of thornless and seedless Honeylocusts, Scotch pine and any of the lindens are some of the species suitable for these plantings. FS 661, "Shade Trees to Replace the American Elm," is a good guide for selecting trees.

Memorial Plantings

Because of their long lives, trees record themselves in the traditions of a community and the memories of its people.

People who have made South Dakota or the nation a better place to live, or who have dedicated themselves to a service or profession in a community, are certainly worthy of a living memorial.

For a memorial planting, choose a tree that's hardy and long-lived. The bur oak, hackberry, sugar maple, pine, spruce and black walnut qualify as appropriate choices for living memorials. Be sure to check on the adaptability of trees you plan to use according to the area and site where they will be planted, so you can expect good survival and a normal life span.

Town's Christmas Tree

The holiday season in many South Dakota communities is officially announced by setting up and lighting an evergreen tree near the hub of the community's activities. Plant an evergreen, like one of the spruces, so it can eventually serve as the town's Christmas tree. Plant a large, balled and burlapped evergreen so it can be used within a few years. It may need to be fenced in to keep 'souvenir hunters' away from it.

Resource Conservation Plantings

Many of South Dakota's tree plantings were planted to conserve our natural resources. Field windbreaks help to protect our soil and its moisture. Farmstead and feedlot windbreaks help reduce home heating bills and livestock feed intakes. Game cover areas usually include trees and shrubs as habitat for wildlife. Contact your tree resource people for more information.

Community Forests

Plan and initiate a 'forest' near your community. This usually involves a planting larger than five acres. It can eventually serve as a community meeting ground, a site for family outings or a place for peaceful relaxation where people can let their imaginations wander. Plant any of the trees mentioned in "Trees for South Dakota," Extension Circular 566. Even a few American elms could be planted in areas where D.E.D. is not expected to be a problem.

Tree Banks

"A short term investment with long-paying dividends" is probably the best way to describe a tree bank. A tree bank is a planting of small, inexpensive trees that develop in less than 10 years into large specimens that can be moved, with large tree-transplanting equipment, into areas where diseased American elms once stood. Ask your city forester or parks superintendent for recommended trees species to plant in a tree bank. It has possibilities for a big pay-off.

Other publications available from your County Extension office on tree species, care and planting include:

- FS 661 Shade Trees to Replace the Elm
- EC 566 Trees of South Dakota
- EC 706 Shrubs of South Dakota
- EMC 689 Take Care of Newly Planted Trees
- EMC 697 General Tree Establishment Procedures
- EMC 698 Planting Bare Root Trees
- EMC 699 Planting Containerized or Potted Trees
- EMC 700 Planting Balled and Burlapped trees

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"He who plants an oak looks forward to future ages, and plants for posterity. Nothing can be less selfish than this."

Washington Irving

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