



How to Spruce Up Your Arbor Day

TREE CITY USA®
BULLETIN

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Arbor Day is opportunity. It is a time to add more trees to our communities that are so much in need of expanded green canopies and the benefits they provide. It is a time to bring people together for a cause that crosses all boundaries of politics, religion or social status. It is the opportunity to educate children and adults about trees and tree care. And for tree boards and professionals in the green industries, it provides priceless exposure to what we do and why.

Few remember the deeds of J. Sterling Morton as Secretary of Agriculture in the administration of President Grover Cleveland. And few care about the fiery editorials he wrote while at the helm of the *Nebraska City News*. What we remember about J. Sterling Morton is his visionary idea for a day set apart to plant trees. Arbor Day is his monument, and nothing would please him more.

The idea Morton presented to the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture in 1872 resulted in 1 million trees being planted later that year on the first Arbor Day. More

than that, Arbor Day became an annual event that quickly spread to all corners of the nation and even overseas. Today, thousands of Tree City USA communities celebrate the holiday and undoubtedly many others that have not yet attained a Tree City USA award.

Arbor Day is a true grass roots idea and not something promulgated from the halls of Congress. It is a community event ranging from a small gathering of schoolchildren to week-long celebrations involving thousands of people with side events featuring artists, musicians, and all the flair of a tourism promotion.

There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Arbor Day. The Arbor Day Foundation honors and appreciates each and every event. However, in this edition of the Bulletin, we issue the challenge to think of how you might do something different next year. Change may not come easy, but a fresh look at your event may result in greater participation and renewed interest. Here are some ideas about how to make a good event even better.



Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Avenue • Nebraska City, NE 68410

A Checklist of Ideas

Tree City USA Standard 4 requires “an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.” Here are some time-tested ideas that go beyond the basics and can help your community to a new and broader level of participation during the tree planting holiday.

INCLUDE COMMUNITY AWARDS

This can be a one-time award, such as a tribute to someone who was the driving force behind a tree or environmental project or who made a significant donation of land or money. Or, it can be an annual award. Examples include best commercial landscaping (or renovated landscape), outstanding school program, an exceptional Scout project, and others that benefit the community.

TIE IN WITH A SERVICE PROJECT

Before or after the traditional ceremony, sponsor a litter pickup and recycling event. Parks, river banks, and other areas that are safe from traffic can usually use a cleanup, and the activity will help attract media coverage. Other service projects might include painting over graffiti, landscaping a public housing project, helping Habitat for Humanity, or providing for other local needs.

PLANT A TREE – THE RIGHT TREE – AND A PLEDGE

It almost goes without saying, but select trees for planting that are appropriate to the site(s) in every way. Explain to your audience why the species or cultivar was selected. For a little something different – and to call attention to the need for follow-up watering and care – have the individuals responsible for the tree sign a pledge, put it in a time capsule jar, and plant it along with the tree.

FIND AND HIGHLIGHT A SPECIAL TREE

Sponsor a contest or search for legacy trees in your community. These may include the largest tree, the largest tree of a selected (desirable) species, trees associated with local history in some way, one-of-a-kind trees, or other features that make the winner(s) special. Name it “Tree of the Year” so the event can be repeated each year.



SPONSOR OR PARTICIPATE IN AN ARTISTIC CONTEST

This might be a poster contest for specific grades; a photo, poetry, or essay contest; a wood craft competition; or a creative art and crafts show. More possibilities include dried flower arrangements, dolls made from corn husks or native materials, and pine cone wreaths. A tree theme that resonates locally might be made part of the rules. Winners, or all participants, can be part of an exhibit made public at the Arbor Day event.



Poster contests and other artistic competitions should be focused on a tree-related theme and can be for both adults and children. The awards can be spread out by age or other categories. This proud child was given the “people’s choice” award in Punta Gorda, Florida. Other categories were “overall winners” and “the mayor’s artistic choice.”

THEATRICALS AND MUSIC

If your community is fortunate enough to have a theatrical group, suggest that they perform a tree-related play either in their usual venue or a short one at the Arbor Day ceremony. More commonly, schoolchildren are asked to do a skit about Arbor Day. Musical performances can also be made. To get extra mileage, repeat the performance at a nursing home or retirement village or at a school.

FOODS FROM NATURE

Cooking demonstrations, recipes, and cookbooks (ideally with the author present) always create interest, especially if samples are available. Emphasis should be on apples, nuts, or other local products from trees.

A CELEBRITY PRESENTATION

By celebrity, this can include someone locally known as an authority on the subject. A PowerPoint presentation or well-done talk with other visual aids will be popular. Ideas include experts on birds, trees, butterflies, or history. Or, it might be authors, Arbor Day award winners who were guests at Arbor Day Farm, or other speakers with interesting, tree-related topics.

A DEMONSTRATION

This might be on pruning, or some aspect of an arborist’s job such as tree climbing, lift truck operation, or aerial rescues. A clinic on power mower or chain saw maintenance for homeowners may be of interest, or free sharpening or trouble shooting.



First-grade students are shown how tree roots impact underground utilities by the Punta Gorda Utilities Department, Florida.

A READ-IN ABOUT TREES

Work with your local library to have a week that features all its fiction and non-fiction books related to trees. The event might include a story hour for children and parents, a book display, a book-signing by a local author, and anything else that might make residents more aware of the resources available to them when they consider planting or tree maintenance.

CEREMONY BASICS

- ✓ Welcome by a master of ceremonies, often the tree board chair.
- ✓ The mayor reads an Arbor Day proclamation.
- ✓ A history of Arbor Day is read.
- ✓ (If a Tree City USA, the flag and other award items are presented, ideally by someone from the state forester’s office).
- ✓ Schoolchildren read poetry, sing, or present a skit.
- ✓ One or more trees are planted.
- ✓ Refreshments and free seedlings are usually made available.

Some Outstanding Examples

There are outstanding Arbor Day observances each year in every state, but here are just a few that might serve as models for communities that want to expand their celebrations.

PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA

In 2013, the City of Punta Gorda, Florida, won the Arbor Day Foundation's Celebration Award. This journey to the top began years earlier when a city employee made a simple request – "Could the city sponsor a tree planting event at my daughter's school?" It did, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Punta Gorda's Arbor Day consists of an awards ceremony (including not only the Tree City USA awards, but a "Friends of Our Urban Forest Award"), a poster contest for the elementary school with support from the Mosaic® Company and the Florida Forest Service, and an event at the city's downtown park for more than 300 first-graders that is surely a day they will never forget. Arbor Day begins with tree songs and includes tree planting in the park, a visit from Smokey Bear, and rotating to six to eight stations on "The Knowledge Trail." Lessons at the stations include:

- Fire prevention and safety.
- Strategically planted trees and crime reduction.
- Minerals, fossils, and mine reclamation for wildlife and people.
- Trees and utilities, including how roots grow.
- How to properly plant and care for trees.

At the end of this eventful day, the children receive a seedling and a certificate of participation that includes the history and heritage of Arbor Day.



CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

Getting media attention for Arbor Day isn't always easy, but the city of Cleveland's Shade Tree Board has found a way to successfully use mass media to get tree information to residents — by creating a citywide contest to locate the largest trees. Each year, the contest focuses on the largest tree of a given species based on diameter, height, and branch spread. After widespread publicity about the contest, residents voluntarily enter their trees by completing a form and submitting an accompanying photo. The winner is then announced at the Arbor Day ceremony, and the tree board publishes a six-page insert for the Sunday edition of the city's newspaper. In this publicity piece, a photo of every tree is shown, along with the address of each one. The insert also includes information about Arbor Day, Cleveland's Tree City USA award, and – importantly – a variety of articles about tree care, tree preservation, cooperating organizations, and the benefits provided by trees.

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

At the other end of the continent, home to the nation's northern-most Tree City USA communities, Arbor Day helps welcome the warm weather. To allow time for the land to thaw, Arbor Day is celebrated in the Fairbanks area in late May. But planning starts much earlier. Each year, a committee of forestry and Scout officials, educators, 4-H volunteers, representatives from Eielson Air Force Base and Fort Wainwright Army Base (both models of Tree City USA award winners), and other organizations gather to select sites for Arbor Day projects and coordinate the efforts of its member groups. And then, throughout the region, especially at schools, events unfold that are not likely to be forgotten, particularly by children. Here are a few of the committee's usual activities:

- A public tree planting with the mayors of Fairbanks, Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the City of North Pole joining together for a reading of the Arbor Day proclamation.
- Tree planting and ceremonies at individual schools, with tools provided by the committee, and sometimes accompanied by Smokey Bear.
- Reforestation plantings in nearby rural areas.
- Teaching about the benefits of trees both in urbanized areas and what Alaskans call "the bush."

EULESS, TEXAS

Like much else in Texas, Arbor Day in many of its communities is BIG! The annual Arbor Daze Festival in Euless is an example. It is a 1½-day celebration of trees that attracts some 8,000 visitors. More than 200 volunteers pitch in to make it possible and the results have yielded international attention and 50 awards for excellent programs and publications. Thanks to its tree giveaway feature, it is also responsible for more than 150,000 trees being planted since the festival's inception in 1989. This is an especially important part of the festival in that it helps counter the area's dwindling tree canopy. This "tree-mendous" event, as it has been called, is held on the grounds of city hall and includes such attractive features as:

- Family-oriented stage entertainment.
- Commercial art and craft vendors and food booths.
- Forestry Village, with tree-related information and tree cookies for the kids. For this popular event, limbs of trees that have been removed by the city are cut into thin slices, drilled, and made into necklaces. Crayons are available for the kids to draw on their necklaces. Up to 3,000 are given away each year!
- Some 1,500 seedlings grown from acorns by the parks department and distributed free along with pecans, dogwoods, and occasionally other species appropriate for the area.
- "Kidz Zone," which has performances, towel art, and other activities especially for children.
- A juried art contest and exhibition.
- Ample parking at the municipal complex and with the cooperation of a nearby church.

Beautiful spring weather enabled the Fairbanks Arbor Day Committee and friends to plant trees on the University of Alaska campus. Different locations in the Fairbanks area benefit each year from the annual event.



SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

In many communities, private or public utilities are a helpful partner for Arbor Day celebrations. An exemplary company is San Diego Gas & Electric®. Each year the company's vegetation and forestry staff conduct an Arbor Day celebration at a local school. The goal is to start young people thinking not only about the benefits provided by trees, but also the importance of proper management of the urban forest. For example, Lilac School in Valley Center, California, was selected for the celebration after several large sycamores at the school were removed because they posed a danger to pedestrians and overhead lines. Children helped plant appropriate replacement trees and company arborists taught a vivid lesson about planting the right tree in the right place. Additional trees were then planted around a large play field to provide much-needed shade.

Do such efforts have an effect? One little girl later wrote, "Have you ever wished that you could help the earth? Well, I did and my wish came true on Arbor Day."

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR AUDIENCE

In some communities, it is a struggle to bring out residents to attend an Arbor Day celebration. Here are some ways to ensure that more than the tree board shows up:

- ✓ Hold the event at a place that will have a built-in audience, such as a school, retirement home, popular commercial area, or noon time at an office complex or government facility.
- ✓ Involve other organizations in your ceremony or activities.
- ✓ Have the school or community band or choir perform.
- ✓ Invite the Scouts to present the flag, serve refreshments, or otherwise participate.
- ✓ Create a publicity plan, including who exactly will execute each part of it. Consider all local mass media and their deadlines or other requirements, and personally contact the appropriate person at the newspaper or station. If posters are used, distribute them widely and include details about time, location, and such things as refreshments, free trees, a drawing, or other enticements.

Arbor Day at School

J. Sterling Morton had the pleasure of seeing Arbor Day spread nationwide during his lifetime. His biographer, James C. Olson, wrote that particularly gratifying to Morton was when schools began observing the tree planting holiday. "It appealed to his sense of the fitness of things," Olson wrote. "Tree planting possessed distinct educational values." Today, more than ever, those values need to be instilled in our youth. Here are some ideas about how to do that.

INCLUDE CHILDREN IN ARBOR DAY CEREMONIES

This can be done through some of the activities listed on the previous pages, such as poetry reading, skits, or poster contests. The school band or choir might add a pleasant dimension, and Scouts can be asked to help in many ways. It can also be very effective to hold the ceremonies on school sites with the added benefits of a guaranteed audience and a harbor from bad weather if necessary.

A NATURE EXPLORE CLASSROOM

What better time to break ground for a Nature Explore Classroom or to dedicate one just completed than to do it as part of an Arbor Day celebration. For an existing classroom, consider holding the Arbor Day ceremonies at this site or conducting tours and explanations for the public. More information about Nature Explore Classrooms can be found at natureexplore.org/classrooms.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

It must be understood that teachers are extremely busy and have a full agenda of curricular needs to be met. This is why they will usually welcome someone else stepping in to make a presentation, lead an activity, and provide materials. Better yet, by planning ahead with a teacher, if your program can tie in with their curricular requirements, you will be especially welcome. Some suggested activities include:

- Reading a book about trees or tree planting. A librarian will have ideas.
- Teaching tree identification or how identification is done using leaf shapes, bark, and other characteristics. Include hands-on activities such as bark rubbings, leaf mounting or tracing, collecting seeds, drawing silhouettes, tree planting, etc.
- Explaining the ecological relationship between trees and birds or other animals.
- Visit arborday.org/ways for more ideas, including ways to incorporate Arbor Day and tree education into school classes and education.



Tree Campus USA® and Arbor Day

Tree Campus USA is an increasingly popular way to recognize institutions of higher education that are excelling in care of their tree resources. It is also a way to teach valuable, hands-on leadership skills to leaders of the future. Like the Tree City USA program, requirements to receive the Tree Campus USA Award include an Arbor Day observance. Tree Campus USA was initiated in 2008 and experience has shown that the Arbor Day celebrations have been embraced with all the exuberance and imagination of college-age students.

TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE – SOUTHEAST CAMPUS

A highlight at this Arlington, Texas, college is that an annual Arbor Day barbecue brings together more than 1,500 students, faculty, and staff – and local community organizations – to make the event a huge success. For example, hospitality management students do much of the organizing, culinary arts students prepare the food, the art department holds a poster design contest to publicize the event, the speech team holds a speech contest about tree conservation and climate change, and the local Garden Club and other organizations sponsor booths on topics such as soil erosion, tree planting, and energy conservation.

ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY

Arbor Day at St. Bonaventure University in New York provides the campus tree advisory committee (one of the five Tree Campus USA requirements) an opportunity to work collaboratively to host an outstanding event. It also means new trees planted. In 2014 a special feature was made part of the ceremony. It provided an excellent platform for announcing the launch of a student-faculty project to add innovative tree identification signs along the university's section of the Allegheny River Valley Trail. At each marker, trail users can use their mobile devices to receive a podcast about the tree.



Education outside the classroom is an important component of Tree Campus USA. At Tarrant County College-Southeast Campus, exhibits are part of the annual event.

TULANE UNIVERSITY

Every campus has some important feature about trees that can be emphasized on Arbor Day. At Tulane University in New Orleans, fruit trees have been the focus of Arbor Day celebrations. The event focuses not only on educating about the diversity and importance of fruit grown in the area, but it also promotes the New Orleans Fruit Tree Project. This nonprofit organization was formed in 2011 as a solution to food insecurity in the greater New Orleans area. It works by inviting residents with fruit trees on their property to register for having volunteers harvest and distribute produce to local organizations that feed the hungry. Other events at Tulane's Arbor Day include fruit tree planting, pruning, and harvesting.

Arbor Day at Tulane University provides an opportunity to call attention to increasingly important edible urban forests.



For More Information

Discover Ways to Celebrate

When J. Sterling Morton founded Arbor Day back in 1872, his idea was simple—set aside a special day for tree planting. And today, that idea is more important than ever.



There is a wealth of helpful information available at arborday.org/ways to help teachers, school board members, youth leaders, and others plan an outstanding Arbor Day celebration. Some of the material you will find includes:

- The history of Arbor Day.
- A calendar to keep planning on schedule.
- How to raise funds.
- A summary of how trees benefit the community.
- Classroom and other activities.
- A sample Arbor Day Proclamation.
- Poems and music.
- Quotes you can use in talks or publications.
- The dates Arbor Day is celebrated in different parts of the country.
- State trees.
- A bibliography of tree identification books, activity guides, organizations, and other sources of additional information.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF: City of Punta Gorda's Annual Arbor Day Celebration (page 2 - right, 3, 4 - bottom, 6), City of Punta Gorda's Downtown Merchants Annual Arbor Day People's Choice Award (page 3 - left), Todd Paris (page 4 - top), City of Arlington, Texas Parks and Recreation (page 7 - top), and Paula Burch-Celetano/Tulane University Communications (page 7 - bottom).

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