

Home/Garden

Sterling Morton was the man who started it all

The Associated Press

Back in April 1872, when J. Sterling Morton spearheaded the first Arbor Day observance, the man who started it all couldn't plant one of the 800 seedlings he'd ordered because the shipment was delayed in transit. However, his fellow Nebraskans set out 1 million trees on their bleak plains that day. After 16 Arbor Days, the count was 350 million.

According to *Midwest Living* magazine, an ardor for Arbor Day comes honestly to Nebraska, especially to Nebraska City, a Missouri River town of 7,100 in the southeast corner of the state. Morton, a newspaperman, was one of Nebraska City's first settlers, and his elegant, 52-room mansion, located on a hill northwest of town, towers in the local consciousness.

Each April, townspeople greet their holiday with a three-day festival. A barbecue on Friday feeds 1,000, a parade on Sunday entertains many more. In between, crowds jam flea markets and a music and crafts fair.

"We're just tickled to have this heritage," says J. Morton Porter, who grew up across the road from Morton's mansion, was named after one of his sons, and now manages the Morton Orchard and Tree Farm. "Since it's Nebraska City's only international holiday, or Nebraska's for that matter, this is a very special occasion for us."

Morton's zeal for trees began soon after he and his bride Caroline left his native Michigan, with its dense forest, for the Nebraska Territory on their wedding day. Back then, most of Nebraska was so treeless that Indians said the only shadows were

cast by clouds.

Nebraska would never realize its great agricultural potential, Morton wrote, unless farmers planted trees to enrich the soil and conserve moisture. Beyond crusading for trees, Morton emerged as one of America's first avid conservationists.

He began by planting trees on his own grassland, then urged his neighbors to do the same. Impatient with his progress, Morton asked the state to declare a tree-planting day. Before the century was over, Arbor Day was on the calendar in every state and in some foreign countries, largely through the efforts of enthusiastic schoolchildren who adopted the cause.

Morton's tree crusade also benefited from his son Joy, who founded Morton Salt Co. and created the huge Morton Arboretum on his estate near Lisle, Ill., outside Chicago.

Nebraska City loves its holiday with a passion. The town's chamber of commerce guesses that as many as 1,000 of the town's 7,127 residents play a part in staging each year's festivities.

Here, as elsewhere, Arbor Day is of special importance to children. On Friday of last year's celebration, 1,300 of them left school to listen to speeches and collect a free seedling.

The highlight of each Arbor Day celebration is a black-tie, invitation-only banquet Saturday evening. The affair is sponsored by the Nebraska City-based National Arbor Day Foundation, a non-profit, educational organization with 500,000 dues-paying members. At the banquet, townspeople, state politicians and national forestry officials gather to honor winners of Arbor Day Awards for conservation projects in communities throughout the U.S.

Arbor Day



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Evergreens

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In most parts of this country, September is a good time to plant evergreen trees to enhance the landscape — but which varieties best suit your purposes?

First, make up your mind what should be their ultimate height and general shape. Then study your catalogs or visit your favorite nursery.

If you want a large tree, consider the pines, spruces and firs. These include the white, red and Scotch pines, all making broad-headed trees eventually. Among the spruces, the Colorado blue is familiar and beautiful, and the Norway is popular. Also well known are the white, Black Hills and Englemann (especially in the West) spruces. Among the firs, consider the blue-tinted white fir, the whitish-barked Arizona fir and the Douglas fir (the latter not a true fir). Soft and graceful are the hemlocks, both eastern and western.

For trees of moderate-size and less spreading, there are red cedars (often called junipers) for dry places, arbor-vitae for wet areas, and plume cypress (*retinosporas*) often used in foundation plantings. The red cedars and arbor-vitae come in various forms and

color tones, such as Rocky Mountain juniper. The plume cypress offers large variety — fan foliage, plume, feathery and threadlike. All three species grow quite tall — to 30 feet or more in time.

Rarer varieties are the Japanese cryptomeria and the umbrella pine or sciadopitys, both fairly narrow trees. Even narrower are the Irish, Columnar Chinese, Italian or Arizona junipers.

For hedges, yews are excellent and for low, flat forms there are spreading junipers of a number of kinds.

All of these may be planted in early and mid-fall. Prepare the soil well. Dig holes two to three times the size of the root ball. The soil to go around the roots should be made water-retentive by adding 10-20 percent peat and fertilized with half as much dried cow manure before shoveling the mixture in. Wait until growth starts in spring before adding a chemical fertilizer.

In all cases, water well, stake if support is necessary, and mulch with 2 inches of peat, leaves, shredded bark or any similar organic product.

Finally, at the onset of winter and again in February, spray trees with an antitranspirant (such as Foli-gard or Wilt-Pruf) to hold in moisture.

Planning needed for planting trees

Trees are the source of cool delight and refreshment on a hot summer afternoon. They are also the source of trouble when they drop their flowers and seed pods in the swimming pool, their branches on the house, litter the yard with their leaves and fill the water pipes with their roots.

There is no way to avoid every problem when you choose a tree for your yard or are part of a committee to plan a municipal planting, but you can balance your aesthetic preferences with the practical demands of a particular site. Arbor Day is celebrated on April 29. This is a perfect time to think about planting a tree in the yard, or in the town.

First, consider the size of the mature tree. Most trees grow slowly, but if you have a small house and yard there will probably come a time when you (or a future owner) regret the pin oak, Norway maple or swamp maple as it towers a hundred feet and totally dominates your space. Anyone who has had to hire and watch someone to take down a large tree near the house to protect it from storm damage, will not wish to repeat the experience.

There are trees that grow more quickly, but Dr. Francis Holmes, Director of the Shade Tree Lab at the University of Massachusetts cautions that fast growing trees tend to be more brittle than slow growing trees. A reader asked about the desirability of poplars as shade trees and certainly some varieties of this large family reach a respectable height quickly (and die at a fairly early age), but the brittle branches create litter and, if the tree is planted too near the house, larger branches can break off in high winds and do some damage.

One poplar that is sometimes used in the landscape is *Populus alba pyramidalis* or Bolleana poplar. Like all the poplars and willows it grows quickly to a mature height of 40 to 70 feet. It prefers sun and a light loam soil, but will tolerate many problems — wet soil, drought, light shade and city pollution. It has an attractive columnar shape, fall color and lives longer than most poplars. However, it has shallow invasive roots that can clog water pipes and drains, and heave sidewalks. It also tends to produce a lot of suckers around the trunk.

If you understand the orientation of your yard and house, you can locate your trees carefully and use these plantings to moderate wind and sun. A windbreak of evergreens on the windward side of the house will protect you from the full force of winter gales. For summer cooling you can plant deciduous trees where they will cast their shade on your house in the afternoon. This kind of climate control can be a real energy and moneysaver.

Fruiting trees can provide you with attractive blossoms in the spring and attract wildlife, but again, choose the tree carefully. You don't want a tree with large fruits that will drop on the lawn and interfere with the lawn mower, and you

Pat Leuchtman Between The Rows



don't want a tree like the mulberry planted near a sidewalk where people will be tracking through the messy fallen berries.

People who choose trees for town streets or parks have some extra things to take into consideration. Dr. Holmes advises municipal tree planters to choose a diversity. Dutch elms were perfect for planting in towns and cities because their roots tolerated soil compaction well, but when the blight hit, cities were denuded of these beautiful mature trees. To avoid such a total disaster, plant several kinds of trees so that if another disease like this ever takes hold, only some trees will fall victim.

Other considerations: Study the growth habit. The pin oak is a handsome slow-growing tree, but its lower branches tend to droop down at a 45 degree angle creating work for the pruners.

Slow-growing trees are good for the town because they will not need pruning so often and they will not grow back as quickly after pruning.

A fairly small (20 - 50 foot) tree that grows at a moderate rate is the shadbush *Amelanchier canadensis*. It will grow well in city or town on a variety of soils, and needs no supplemental fertilizing. It has white flowers in spring, tiny fruits in summer that are quickly eaten by the birds, and yellow, orange and rusty red foliage in autumn.

As New England has lost its farms, trees have taken over the pastures and fields. We are much more heavily wooded than we were a hundred years ago and sometimes we take these trees for granted. But Arbor Day gives us an opportunity to consider how important trees are. They can moderate temperatures, wind, noise, provide fuel for our beloved fireplaces, fine woods for our furniture and pleasure to our eye and spirit.



Pin Oak

We have what you need to KNOW

How To Keep

Model 1220