

What is Arbor Day?

The first Arbor Day was started by a journalist in the Nebraska territory, Julius Sterling Morton in 1872. Mr. Morton set a date in April to be a day for planting trees, and whoever planted the most trees, whether it was individuals, counties, or neighborhoods, would win prizes. In 1874 the governor of the state of Nebraska proclaimed Arbor Day on April 10th, 1874, and then in 1885 legalized Arbor Day as a state-wide holiday on Morton's birthday, April 22nd. Today Arbor Day is celebrated in all 50 states and all around the world on dates that are best for tree planting in that climate, usually in the Spring.

In Pennsylvania, Arbor Day is celebrated the last Friday in April each year. It is a special holiday, a time to celebrate all that trees provide for us, and a time to plant trees. Most holidays we celebrate are in honor of something that happened in the past, or of a person who did something great. Arbor Day is a holiday that looks to the future—a tree planted today represents the belief that the tree will grow and someday provide shade, beauty and inspiration for generations to come.

Why do we plant trees?

Why should we celebrate trees?

Where would you rather stand when it is 90 degrees out in July?
In the middle of a parking lot or under a tree?

- Trees provide shade and cool our homes, schools, recess yards and playgrounds.
- It can be 10 degrees cooler under the shade of a tree on a hot day.
- Trees convert carbon dioxide, which we breathe out, to oxygen that we can breathe in.
- Trees clean the air and absorb pollution. In Pittsburgh, the air has a higher amount of particulate matter than nearly any other city in the United States. This is due to nearby coal-fired power plants. Microscopic particulate matter gets into your lungs and can make it hard to breathe. Street trees in Pittsburgh remove 12.8 tons of Particulate Matter, Nitrous Oxide, Ozone, and Sulfur Dioxide from the air each year, making it easier for us all to breathe. (Pittsburgh's STRATUM Report, 2005, www.treepittsburgh.org/stratum)
- Trees provide a home and food for wildlife.
- Dead trees decompose and add nutrients to the soil to help other plants grow.
- Trees give us products such as: maple syrup, paper, building materials, fruits like apples, peaches, pears, and more.

What else do trees give us? What sorts of things do you use every day that come from trees? Is it possible to make those useful things out of other materials?

