



Arbor Day & Earth Day

APRIL

SINCE BOTH ARBOR DAY and Earth Day focus on the environment, they are combined in this unit. National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April and Earth Day is April 22.

Arbor Day

In the 1840s, the mid-western state of Nebraska was a territory on a wide prairie. When pioneers settled there, they found few trees for building houses or to burn for fuel. There was no shade from the sun or wind, and crops did not grow well in the dry earth.

J. Sterling Morton was one of those pioneers who moved to the treeless Nebraska territory. He and his wife planted trees on their property immediately after moving from their hometown of Detroit, Michigan. Morton was a journalist, and later the editor, for Nebraska's first newspaper. In his writings, he advocated planting trees to help life on the vast barren plain.

Later, as a member of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, Morton proposed that citizens of the new state set aside April 10 as a day to plant trees. He believed that the planting of trees and orchards would greatly improve Nebraska's economy and landscape. He suggested offering prizes as incentives to communities and organizations that planted the most trees properly. Everyone welcomed

the idea enthusiastically. On April 10, 1874, people throughout Nebraska planted about one million trees in celebration of that first Arbor Day. Several years later, Nebraska declared Arbor Day to be a state holiday, and the date was changed to April 22, 1882, which was Morton's birthday.



The tradition of celebrating Arbor Day spread quickly through the United States. During the 1870s, following Nebraska's lead, other states adopted the tradition and began to plant Arbor Day trees. At first there was no set date for the celebration, though the last Friday in April was most commonly chosen as the official day. Today National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April; however, because the best tree-planting season changes from region to region, states often choose an alternate date for planting trees. In Hawaii, for example, people plant Arbor Day trees on the first Friday in November, and in Florida, Arbor Day is the third Friday in January.

Arbor Day has now spread beyond the United States and is celebrated in many countries of the world. Because of J. Sterling Morton and his interest in the environment and the wide-scale planting of trees, citizens throughout the world have become more aware of the importance of trees. School children have learned about how trees provide wind and heat protection as well as food and shelter. And

PREVIOUS PAGE: The earth, as seen from space
ABOVE: On Arbor Day groups of schoolchildren work together to plant trees.



today a visitor to Nebraska would never guess that it was once a dusty and treeless land.

“Arbor Day...is not like other holidays. Each of those reposes on the past, while Arbor Day proposes for the future.” —J. Sterling Morton

Earth Day

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans across the United States celebrated the first Earth Day. The goal of this event was to emphasize the critical importance of the environment

and to make **legislators** and the American public aware of the growing destruction of the earth’s natural resources. The founder of Earth Day, Senator Gaylord Nelson, had hoped to start an environmental **movement** so large that it would force politicians to address environmental issues.

His efforts were successful. The first Earth Day got the attention of lawmakers, and as a result, environmental **preservation** became a national concern. That year the Environmental Protection Agency was created, and Congress **amended** the Clean

Above: California redwood trees often receive attention on Earth Day due to their massive height (109 meters tall) and their extensive lifespan (600 years).

