

Oklahoma's Arbor Week

Although National Arbor Day is not until the last Friday in April, Oklahoma gets a jump start on the state celebration by observing Arbor Week the last full week of March. This is a way for our state to recognize the value and benefits of trees to the community by providing shade, purifying air and water, managing soil erosion and improving our quality of life. So, starting today, it's time to get your tree party started.

The first Arbor Day in the United States was officially proclaimed March 12, 1874, in Nebraska, and the day itself was observed April 10. Eleven years later Nebraska declared Arbor Day as a legal holiday.

Trees not only add a pleasing look to the landscape, they also serve several special purposes. In the early days, trees were needed as windbreaks to help keep the soil in place. In addition, they were needed for fuel and building materials, as well as shade from the hot sun.

Trees today also serve a variety of purposes. Did you know trees placed properly around buildings can reduce air conditioning need by up to 30 percent? In fact, the net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to 10 room-sized air conditioning operating 20 hours per day.

Not only are trees great for home landscapes, but towns and cities also can benefit. For every 5 percent of tree cover added to a community, storm water runoff is reduced by about 2 percent by absorbing and filtering rainwater.

And we all know how great it is to breathe clean air. Interestingly, over the course of a year, an acre of forest can consume the amount of carbon dioxide created by driving a car 26,000 miles, which is about twice the annual mileage for an average driver.

Oklahoma is still reeling from the devastating effects of the back-to-back years of drought in 2011 and 2012. And although we did receive ample rainfall during 2013, we are still experiencing moderate to extreme drought across the state. This drought puts additional stress on trees. With the continued drought and trees already under stress, we expect to continue to see decline.

Now, more than ever, it's important to replenish the urban forest by planting new trees. And what better time than now to plant trees, during Oklahoma's Arbor Week? Arbor Week reminds us that trees should be planted every year as part of a long-term replacement plan. While management of the urban forest is often a community wide effort, it is possible to plan for and implement a tree replacement plan even in the residential landscape.

Trees are generally long lived, but are often slow growing. It takes many years to replace a mature tree when it dies. That's why it's important to continually replace trees. And now is the perfect time to plant trees before the harsh summer heat arrives.

Please feel free to stop by or contact me if I can be of assistance.

John Holman, Extension Educator Ag/Youth Development

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