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Arbor Day Fact Sheet

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SUMMARY

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Reference and Instruction
Librarian

Arbor Day Fact Sheet

Arbor Day is a civic holiday observed in all 50 states. In the United States, it is celebrated as National Arbor Day on the last Friday in April, although some states observe it on other dates, depending on the local planting climate.

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to National Arbor Day and celebrations of Arbor Day. It contains a brief history, legislation, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected governmental and nongovernmental resources.

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Introduction

Arbor Day is a civic holiday observed in all 50 states and many other countries around the world. In the United States, it is celebrated as National Arbor Day on the last Friday in April, although some states observe it on other dates, depending on the local planting climate.¹

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to National Arbor Day and celebrations of Arbor Day. It contains a brief history, legislation, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected governmental and nongovernmental resources.

History

Arbor Day was first observed on April 10, 1872,² when Sterling Morton put forward a Nebraska state resolution to designate a day for planting trees and offered a prize for the person who planted the most trees.³ Over 1 million trees were planted.⁴ Nebraska was the first state to established Arbor Day as a state holiday in 1885, held annually on April 22 in honor of Morton's birthday.⁵ The holiday spread through other states, starting with Kansas, Tennessee, Minnesota, and Ohio,⁶ and by 1978⁷ all 50 states officially celebrated Arbor Day.

While Arbor Day is not a federal holiday, President Richard Nixon declared the last Friday in April as National Arbor Day in 1972,⁸ on the centennial anniversary. However, not every state celebrates on the official day, depending on local climates and planting seasons.⁹

Table 1. Arbor Day Celebration, by State

State	Date	Citation
Alabama	Last full week of February ^a	1975 Ala. Laws 249
Alaska	Third Monday in May	Alaska Stat. §41.15.900
Arizona	Last Friday in April	Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §1-304
Arkansas	Third Monday in March	Ark. Code Ann. §1-5-106(5)
California	March 7	Cal. Gov't. Code §6710
Colorado	Third Friday in April	Colo. Rev. Stat. §24-11-104
Connecticut	Last Friday in April	Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-29a(3)

¹ Arbor Day Foundation, "Arbor Day Around the Globe," accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/celebrate/globe>.

² Arbor Day Foundation, "History of Arbor Day," accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/celebrate/history>.

³ Jane M. Hatch, "Arbor Day," in *The American Book of Days* (The H.W. Wilson Company, 1978), p. 367.

⁴ Jessica Damiano, "Oaks Excel at Supporting the Food Web (Including Us). Arbor Day is a Good Time to Plant One," AP, April 22, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/arbor-day-oak-trees-gardening-2ada64ce9544f2ac510d2297e3695092>.

⁵ Hatch, "Arbor Day," p. 367.

⁶ Robert J. Myers, "Arbor Day," in *Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 119.

⁷ Hatch, "Arbor Day," p. 368.

⁸ U.S. President (Richard Nixon), "Proclamation 4126—National Arbor Day (April 24, 1972)," The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-4126-national-arbor-day>.

⁹ Arbor Day Foundation, "Arbor Day Around the Globe," accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/celebrate/globe>.

State	Date	Citation
Delaware	Last Friday in April	Del. Code Ann. tit. I, §601
Florida	Third Friday in January	Fla. Stat. §683.04
Georgia	Third Friday in February	1941 Ga. Laws 350 b
Hawai'i	First Friday in November	Haw. Rev. Stat. §8-7
Idaho	A day during the month of April	Idaho Code §33-160
Illinois	Last Friday in April	5 Ill. Comp. Stat. 490/10
Indiana	Last Friday in April	Ind. Code §20-30-3-1
Iowa	Last Friday in April	Iowa Code §1C.10
Kansas	Last Friday in April	Kansas Stat. Ann. §35-204
Kentucky	As designated	1885 vol. I 266c
Louisiana	Third Friday in January	La. Stat. Ann §1:57
Maine	Third full week of May ^d	Me. Stat. tit. I, §111-A
Maryland	First Wednesday in April	1967 Md. Laws 517
Massachusetts	Last Friday in April	Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 6, §15e
Michigan	Last Friday in April	Mich. Comp. Laws §435.171f
Minnesota	Last Friday in April	1965 Minn. Laws 571
Mississippi	Second Friday in February	2009 Miss. Laws 2227
Missouri	First Friday in April	Mo. Rev. Stat. §9.100
Montana	Last Friday in April	Mont. Code Ann. §20-1-206(1)(c)
Nebraska	Last Friday in April	Neb. Rev. Stat. §62-301(1)
Nevada	Last Friday in April	Nev. Rev. Stat. §236.018
New Hampshire	Last Friday in April	N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. §227-1:3(II)
New Jersey	Last Friday in April	N.J. Stat. Ann. §18A:36-7
New Mexico	Second Friday in March	N.M. Stat. Ann. §12-5-1
New York	Last Friday in April	N.Y. Env't Conserv. §1-0303(23)
North Carolina	First Friday after March 15	1981 N.C. Sess. Laws 510
North Dakota	First Friday in May	N.D. Cent. Code §1-03-07
Ohio	Last Friday in April	Ohio Rev. Code Ann. §5.22
Oklahoma	Friday following the second Monday in February	Okla. Stat. tit. 70, §24-107
Oregon	Month of April ^s	See end notes.
Pennsylvania	Last Friday in April	44 Pa. Code §19.2
Rhode Island	Last Friday in April	R.I. Gen. Laws §25-2-30
South Carolina	First Friday in December	S.C. Code Ann. §53-3-10
South Dakota	Last Friday in April	S.D. Codified Laws §1-5-10
Tennessee	First Friday in March ^h	1947 Tenn. Pub. Acts 412i
Texas	First Friday in November	Tex. Gov't Code Ann. §662.057

State	Date	Citation
Utah	Last Friday in April	See end notes.
Vermont	First Friday in May	Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 1, §372
Virginia	Last Friday in April	Va. Code Ann. §2.2-3306
Washington	Second Wednesday in April	Wash. Rev. Code §1.20.020
West Virginia	Second Friday in April	1955-1956 W. Va. Acts 564
Wisconsin	Last Friday in April	Wis. Stat. §118.02
Wyoming	Last Monday in April	Wyo. Stat. Ann. §8-4-102

Source: Table compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

- a. Celebrated as Arbor Week.
- b. Celebrated as Arbor and Bird Day.
- c. “The Governor be, and is hereby, requested to call to the attention of the people of this State to the importance of planting trees ... to be known and designated as ‘Arbor Day.’” Different dates are designated depending on city or county.
- d. Celebrated as Arbor Week.
- e. Celebrated as Arbor and Bird Day.
- f. As designated by the governor. As of 2020, the governor has traditionally declared the last week of April as Arbor Week and the last Friday in April as Arbor Day.
- g. Or. Rev. Stat. § 336.015 was repealed in 2012, since 2020, Oregon’s Governor or State Forester has proclaimed the entire month of April as Oregon Arbor Month: <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/forestbenefits/Documents/arbor-month-fact-sheet-2022.pdf>.
- h. Celebrated as Bird, Flower, and Arbor Day.
- i. Originally celebrated in April, however, 1947 Tenn. Pub. Acts 412 repealed Title 7, Chapter 2, §2501 2501, striking April for March.
- j. 1981 Utah Laws 1220 eliminated Arbor Day as a legal holiday; however, it is celebrated annually on the last Friday in April: <https://ffsl.utah.gov/forestry/urban-and-community-forestry/arbor-day/>.

Early Advocates

Sterling Morton moved to Nebraska in 1855, where he edited the *Nebraska City News* and took an avid interest in agriculture, which led him to planting trees to serve as windbreaks and provide lumber and shade.¹⁰ He served in the Nebraska territorial legislature and as Secretary of the Nebraska territory.¹¹ President Grover Cleveland appointed Morton as Secretary of Agriculture from 1893 to 1897.¹² In 1937, Nebraska donated a bronze statue of Morton to the National Statuary Hall Collection (replaced in 2023 by the statue of Willa Cather).¹³ His home was donated in 1923 and is now the Arbor Lodge State Historic Park.¹⁴

¹⁰ Hatch, “Arbor Day,” p. 367.

¹¹ Architect of the Capitol, “Julius Sterling Morton,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20201230003720/https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/julius-sterling-morton>.

¹² Hatch, “Arbor Day,” p. 367.

¹³ U.S. Government Printing Office, “Acceptance of the statues of J. Sterling Morton and William Jennings Bryan. Presented by the State of Nebraska,” Proceedings in the Congress and in the Rotunda, United States Capitol., 75th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Document No. 73.

¹⁴ Nebraska Game and Parks, “Arbor Lodge State Historical Park,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://outdoornebraska.gov/location/arbor-lodge/>.

Another early proponent of Arbor Day was Dr. Birdsey G. Northrup. He traveled across the country and globally to encourage the planting of trees and village beautification projects.¹⁵ Northrup was also an advocate for children's involvement with Arbor Day celebrations—he even offered cash incentives for children to plant trees in 1876.¹⁶ Northrup viewed economic tree-planting and school celebrations of Arbor Day as different in scope and did not think Arbor Day should become a legal holiday except in Nebraska.¹⁷

Celebrations

Morton wrote that “other holidays repose upon the past—Arbor Day proposes for the future.”¹⁸ Arbor Day is frequently celebrated in schools and youth-focused civic groups. These celebrations began in 1882, when a Cincinnati superintendent closed its public schools¹⁹ and created a program for children to celebrate with tree planting, parades, reading poems, hymns, and speeches. The National Forestry Association and the National Education Association adopted resolutions in 1883 and 1885, respectively, advocating for active involvement of schools and schoolchildren in the observation of Arbor Day.²⁰ On April 15, 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt penned an “Arbor Day Letter to the School Children of the United States.”²¹

Arbor Day trees are frequently planted in memory of key figures or as memorials, including on Capitol grounds.²² A *Juglans nigra* (Eastern Black Walnut) tree was planted at the Capitol in 1932 to honor the 100th anniversary of the birth of Sterling Morton,²³ and the Arbor Lodge Association of Nebraska City planted a *Ginkgo biloba* (Maidenhair) tree in 1967.²⁴

Arbor Day Foundation and Tree City USA

The Arbor Day Foundation was established in 1972 by John Rosenow on the centennial of the first Arbor Day.²⁵ It has planted over 500 million trees²⁶ since its inception. In association with the National Association of State Foresters and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest

¹⁵ Hatch, “Arbor Day,” p. 368.

¹⁶ Myers, “Arbor Day,” p. 119.

¹⁷ Birdsey Northrup, “Arbor Day in Schools,” in *Arbor Day: Its History, Observance, Spirit and Significance: With Practical Selections on Tree-planting and Conservation, and A Nature Anthology*, ed. Robert H. Schauffler (Omnigraphics, 1990), pp. 13-14.

¹⁸ Myers, “Arbor Day,” p. 117.

¹⁹ Hatch, “Arbor Day,” p. 368.

²⁰ Hatch, “Arbor Day,” p. 368.

²¹ Robert Haven Schauffler (ed.), *Arbor Day: Its History, Observance, Spirit and Significance; With Practical Selections on Tree-Planting and Conservation, and a Nature Anthology* (Omnigraphics, 1990), pp. v-vi.

²² Architect of the Capitol, “Trees on the U.S. Capitol Grounds,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/features/trees>.

²³ Architect of the Capitol, “Arbor Day Founder Tree,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/features/arbor-day-founder-tree>.

²⁴ Architect of the Capitol, “Arbor Lodge Association of Nebraska City Tree,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/features/arbor-lodge-association-nebraska-city-tree>.

²⁵ National Association of State Foresters, “John Rosenow, the founder of the Arbor Day Foundation, announces transition to retirement,” press release, January 16, 2014, <https://www.stateforesters.org/2014/01/16/john-rosenow-the-founder-of-the-arbor-day-foundation-announces-transition-to-retirement/>.

²⁶ Arbor Day Foundation, “Home,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/>.

Service,²⁷ the Arbor Day Foundation has sponsored the Tree City USA program—a national program to recognize communities committed to trees and forests. To become a designated Tree City USA, cities must meet four standards:²⁸ they must have (1) a community tree board or department, (2) a public tree care ordinance, (3) an annual expenditure of \$2 per capita on community tree care activities, and (4) an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. Over 3,500 communities have been recognized as Tree City USA.²⁹

Legislation

Below is a list of selected proposed legislation and resolutions concerning Arbor Day:

H.R. 2477—Urban Forests Act of 2021—would have in part established a grant program known as the Tree City USA Grant Program

S.J.Res. 14 (2013) —would have amended title 36, *United States Code*, to designate the last Friday in April as Arbor Day

H.R. 1357 and H.R. 3832 (1977)—would have prevented the unauthorized manufacture and use of the name and symbol “Tree City, USA”

Resolutions (1970-1994) to authorize the President to declare specific days as “National Arbor Day” each year.

Resolutions (2012-2024) celebrating the anniversary of Arbor Day

Related Research Reports

CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Selected Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Members of Congress often speak on the floor or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* on or around Arbor Day, including

- recognizing National Arbor Day and the anniversary of Arbor Day,
- recognizing Tree City USA designations and Arbor Day celebrations in their districts, and
- offering tributes to individual constituents involved with Arbor Day.

Presidential Proclamations

Presidential proclamations and statements have been issued since the early days of Arbor Day, including the following:

²⁷ National Association of State Foresters, “How Your Community can Apply to be a Tree City USA,” April 26, 2016, <https://www.stateforesters.org/2016/04/26/how-your-community-can-apply-to-be-a-tree-city-usa/>.

²⁸ Arbor Day Foundation, “Tree City USA Standards,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa/standards>.

²⁹ Arbor Day Foundation, “Tree City USA,” accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.arborday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa>.

Warren G. Harding, “Proclamation 1624—Forest Protection Week and Golden Anniversary of Arbor Day” (March 31, 1922).

Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President: The Diamond Anniversary of Arbor Day” (April 10, 1947).

Richard Nixon, “Proclamation 4126—National Arbor Day” (April 24, 1972).

Additional presidential statements and proclamations related to Arbor Day are available through the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara.³⁰

Government Resources

The Library of Congress has a variety of resources on Arbor Day, including books, newspaper articles, photographs, and school celebrations.

Urban and Community Forestry Program – United State Forest Service

Arbor Lodge State Historical Park – Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

Nongovernment Resources

Arbor Day Foundation

The Arbor Day Foundation partners with several programs, including Tree City USA, Alliance for Community Trees, Tree Campus Higher Education, Tree Campus K-12, and Natural Disaster Recovery.

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³⁰ The American Presidency Project, hosted by the University of California, Santa Barbara, offers browsing and searching of many presidential documents at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.