



## ..... STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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As I write this week's edition it is Arbor Day. It probably behooves me to dedicate this week's discussion to this effort in environmental stewardship that originated right here in Nebraska. For you that don't know, in 1872, J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees and this holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of more than a million trees in Nebraska. Arbor Day is now observed throughout the nation and the world. You can be proud that Nebraska has led the world in recognizing the power of the tree. It has been said that wherever they are planted, trees are a source of joy and spiritual renewal. I cannot argue that, and in fact it does come to mind the poem that many of us had to learn as young school children – "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer.

Let's see if I can still recite that poem from the memory of so long ago at the Ash Grove District 22 School that served our family and neighbors so well. Here we go: "I think that I shall never see; A poem lovely as a tree. A tree whose hungry mouth is prest; against the earth's sweet flowing breast. A tree that looks at God all day; and lifts her leafy arms to pray. A tree that may in summer wear; a nest of robins in her hair. Upon whose bosom snow has lain; who intimately lives with rain. Poems are made by fools like me; but only God can make a tree." How did I do? I am betting you were saying it too.

What is poignant is that that poem still holds true through today. You don't have to be a tree-hugger to appreciate trees or to celebrate Arbor Day or for that matter all year round. I personally hate to see all the trees that have been torn out over the years. It saddens me to see great windbreaks that have been dozed out for just a couple more acres of farm land. I remember both of my grandfathers, telling me why they were planted and I can just imagine how they would look on this, much like they would the removal of grassed waterways, terraces and of course all the grassland that has been converted to farm land. I hope we don't rue the day that we did this. Not only did these trees break the wind for wind erosion, provided shelter for wildlife and cattle in pastures and fields during the winter months and shade during the summer months they accomplished much more. I found some more interesting facts that I will share in the rest of this article.

Excess carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) caused by many factors is a building up in our atmosphere and contributing to climate change that many believe is occurring. Trees absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, removing and storing the carbon while releasing the oxygen back into the air. In one year, an acre of mature trees absorbs the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> produced when you drive your car 26,000 miles. Furthermore, trees absorb odors and pollutant gases (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, sulfur dioxide and ozone) and filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark. In one year an acre of mature trees can provide enough oxygen for 18 people. You might think that those are the only things that trees provide. Believe me there is much more.

Trees cool their surroundings by up to 10°F, by shading our homes and streets, breaking up urban "heat islands" and releasing water vapor into the air through their leaves. Three trees placed strategically around a single-family home can cut summer air conditioning needs by up to 50 percent. By reducing the energy demand for cooling our houses, we reduce carbon dioxide and other pollution emissions from power plants. Shade from trees slows water evaporation from thirsty lawns. Most newly planted trees need only fifteen gallons of water a week. As trees transpire, they increase atmospheric moisture.

Trees reduce runoff by breaking rainfall thus allowing the water to flow down the trunk and into the earth below the tree. This prevents storm water from carrying pollutants to the streams, rivers and lakes. When mulched, trees act like a sponge that filters this water naturally and uses it to recharge groundwater supplies. We must not forget that trees help prevent soil erosion from both wind and rain. On hillsides or stream slopes, trees slow runoff and hold soil in place.

Don't forget that trees provide food! An apple tree can yield up to 15-20 bushels of fruit per year and can be planted on the tiniest urban lot. Aside from fruit for humans, trees provide food for birds and wildlife. When you think of it, these trees create economic opportunities. Fruit harvested from community orchards can be sold, thus providing income. Small business opportunities in green waste management and landscaping arise when cities value mulching and its water-saving qualities. Vocational training for youth interested in green jobs is also a great way to develop economic opportunities from trees.

Trees block things. They can mask concrete walls, parking lots, and unsightly views. They go a long ways in muffling sounds and even smells from nearby streets, farms, feedlots, equipment and even school yards, and creates an eye-soothing canopy of green. Trees absorb dust and wind and reduce glare. Not only that, trees provide wood. Trees can be selectively harvested for fuel and craft wood. Important for landowners, trees increase property values. The beauty of a well-planted property and its surrounding street and neighborhood can raise property values by as much as 15 percent. What is important to many of us is that trees mark the seasons. Is it winter, spring, summer or fall? Just look at the tree!

I urge all citizens to go past the celebration of Arbor Day and to support efforts to protect our trees and woodlands and to plant trees to gladden the heart and promote the well-being of this and future generations. It does a soul good to plant and cultivate a tree and even more so – several trees. I believe that it was Lucy Larcom who said: "He who plants a tree plants hope." In regards to what is happening all around us in today's world we should take to heart the words of the immortal Ralph Waldo Emerson who said: "In the woods we return to reason and faith." Nothing so soothing, as sitting under a tree!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: [dlienemann2@unl.edu](mailto:dlienemann2@unl.edu) or on the web at: <http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster>