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ARBOR DAY

ORIGIN & MEANING

In many countries it has long been the tradition to hold annually a tree or forest festival. The origin of such celebrations must date back to antiquity and be lost in the dawn of religious feeling and awe for what trees represented. However, Arbor Day, as it is commonly known today, is of American origin and evolved from conditions peculiar to the Great Plains. It was first observed in Nebraska in 1872.

The idea, conceived by J.S. Morton, then a member of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, was one of forest conservation. It was a move to promote replanting, following deforestation, and to plant up treeless areas. This idea has spread widely to other lands where it is variously celebrated as the "Festival of Trees", "Greening Week" of Japan, "The New Year's Day of Trees" in Israel, "The Tree-loving Week" of Korea, "The Reforestation Week" of Yugoslavia, "The Students' Afforestation Day" of Iceland and "The National Festival of Tree Planting" in India. Arbor Day in its various forms is now recognised in more than fifty countries.

IN AUSTRALIA

Arbor Day in Australia was first observed on 20 June 1889, in Adelaide, and was organised by Mr J. Ednie-Brown, the South Australian Woods and Forests Department's first conservator.

In Ednie-Brown's 1896-97 Annual Report, as conservator of the Western Australian Woods and Forests Department, he mentions the supply of surplus seedlings for various purposes, including Arbor Day.

In Victoria, it was first observed in 1909.

In Western Australia the celebration of this day was provided for in the Forests Act 1919 and now the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984. The date for its celebration is fixed each year by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management to coincide with the Day of Trees during Western Australia Week.

In 1987 Arbor Day is on 5 June.

IMPORTANCE OF ARBOR DAY

On Arbor Day, particular attention is drawn to the part trees play in our lives. It is not just a day to plant trees and then to forget the gesture for another twelve months. Planting a tree one day is no credit to us if, during the rest of the year, we neglect to care for it and those already growing. Our thoughts on Arbor Day should be an expression of enduring feeling, thought and action and not just one single, isolated flame of interest.

In schools and other community groups, this day can be celebrated in many different ways:

- By planting trees or shrubs in school grounds, along neighbouring streets or in civic parks.
- By "adopting" a patch of bush, with the landowner's consent, and caring for it by removal of weeds, rubbish, etc., by preparing firebreaks and by fencing and making paths to reduce trampling.
- By presenting a play or mime about trees in the history of Australia.
- By completing a project about certain types of trees (e.g. Jarrah, Boab) or famous trees (e.g. Gloucester Tree fire lookout, Foundation Tree).
- As a class activity or common interest group, go on a visit to a bush area with a spokesperson to explain the characteristics of plant species, and their niche in the natural environment.
- Collect some tree seeds, germinate them in a classroom, and plant out the seedlings.
- Carry out an identification of trees in a specific part of your school or neighbourhood. A tree labelling ceremony could also be arranged.
- Compile a list of everyday objects that are made of wood or wood-based materials, and find out how the wood was processed, where it came from and whatever else you can.

Trees and shrubs, whether native or introduced to W.A., provide opportunities for the interest and study by the whole community, and when we walk around our own neighbourhood or drive through the countryside, we can appreciate the importance of such a diversity of plants to the well being of humanity.



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
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