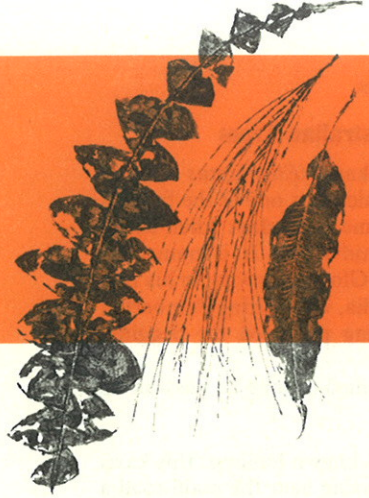

INFORMATION SHEET 42

REVISED DECEMBER, 1979

ARBOR DAY

The Origin and 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 the Trees", "Greening Week" of Japan, "The New Year's Day of the 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

According to new information, 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 (prior to the passing of the Forests Act and the formation of the present 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 which became law in 1919. There is no fixed date for its celebration, and the ideal time will vary from one end of the state to the other. In the South-West it has been customary to recognise the first Wednesday in July as Arbor Day, but this is frequently varied.

The Importance of Trees to Man

Trees influence human welfare in many different ways. From them we obtain timber for construction purposes, fuel for the fire, plywood, paper, cardboard, celluloid, rayon, rubber, tannin, cork, drugs, resins, fruit, nuts, honey and numerous other commodities necessary to our present civilisation. Trees also play a major part in soil and water conservation, they provide shade and shelter from the sun and wind and beautify the countryside and cities. It may be said of our cities that no single item distinguishes them more than their green areas and probably one's first reaction to a community is its lack or abundance of trees.

A few minutes' thought is sufficient to make one realise that trees and tree products are so intimately woven into our everyday life that it is difficult to imagine how we would fare without them. Past civilisations have disappeared through failing to appreciate such benefits. Proud and powerful empires have vanished under stress, not of an invading army, but of reckless destruction of the country's trees and the consequent loss of soil, water and commodities which supported human life.

Many authorities believe that some of the world's deserts have resulted from thoughtless or ignorant destruction of forests. In Western Australia, it has been shown that permanent removal of forests has turned most of the major rivers from fresh to salty water.

The covering of vegetation which nature uses to protect the earth and its inhabitants has been developed over many thousands of years. A large jarrah forest tree may have taken 300 years to grow—many of these trees now passing through our timber mills were probably in existence when Dampier first visited these shores. Many are older still!

Economic necessity requires certain trees to be felled for timber production but wanton destruction of trees must be prevented at all costs.

The 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 a person if, during the rest of the year, he neglects 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 neighbourhood streets or in civic parks.
- By presenting a one-act play or mime about trees in the history of Australia.
- By completing a project about certain types of trees or famous trees, e.g. George Washington's cherry tree, Gloucester tree fire lookout, General Sherman's Big Tree.
- As a class activity or common interest group, go on a visit to a forest or a council park with a spokesman from the management agency to explain the types of trees and their characteristics.

- Collect some tree seed and try germinating it in a classroom.
- 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, etc.

Trees and shrubs provide opportunities for the interest and study of the whole population, and if one walks around his own district, he may be amazed at the number and variety of trees that are growing in home gardens or small parks.

Special Trees in Western Australia

Because the Western Australian land mass was for a long time—thousands of years—isolated from the rest of Australia and the rest of the world, its trees and shrubs have evolved in a unique way. In the southern part of the state in particular, most naturally-occurring plants are quite unique and do not occur anywhere else in the world. We have special names for them too, most of them being given to them by the aboriginal population, long before European settlement began. Some of the so-called "common" names vary from place to place, and this is why the complicated scientific names are used. The list which follows is for some of our more common trees.

	Main Common Names	*Other Names*
Acacia aneura	Mulga	—
Adansonia gregorii	Boab	Baobab, Northern baobab, dead rat tree
Agonis flexuosa	W.A. peppermint	—
Banksia grandis	Bull banksia	—
Casuarina fraserana	Sheoak	—
Eucalyptus marginata	Jarrah	Swan River mahogany
patens	W.A. blackbutt	Yarri
calophylla	Marri	Red gum
wandoo	Wandoo	White gum
diversicolor	Karri	—
gomphocephala	Tuart	Tooart, white gum
accedens	Powder bark wandoo	Pinky
rudis	Flooded gum	River gum, blue gum
Melaleuca lanceolata	Rottnest tea tree	—

Some Famous Western Australian Trees

Gloucester Tree. This is a karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*) tree near Pemberton, which was one of the famous tree lookouts until these became redundant when aerial fire detection began in the mid-1970s. It is named in honour of H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester who, in his role as Governor General of Australia, was visiting Pemberton at the time the tree was being prepared for pegging, in 1946.

Gloucester Tree will be retained as long as possible so that tourists may climb it.

Diamond Tree. Another well-known lookout, this karri tree stands in its own little clearing near the main road a few kilometres south of Manjimup. A picnic area, information board and adventure trail are also established at this site.

King Jarrah, Sawyer's Valley. The little town of Sawyer's Valley is so named because it began as a settlement for a few families of Welsh origin who cut through the adjoining forests using a pit-saw technique (see Information Sheet 9). The King Jarrah that remains, only 500 m or so from the town, was probably left intact because it was too big to be pit-sawn. It is not easy to locate, but enquiries at the Forests Department office, Mundaring Weir, should provide assistance in finding this tree.

Valley of the Giants. A relatively small patch of forest adjacent to the South Coast Highway between Walpole and Denmark, contains a stand of the amazing giant tingle. There are three species of tingle:

Eucalyptus jacksonii	Red tingle tingle
Eucalyptus guilfoylei	Yellow tingle tingle
Eucalyptus brevistylis	Rate's tingle

The big trunks, some of which have been burnt out at the butt to create a small room, are examples of red tingle tingle, the largest having a girth in excess of 20 m.

King Jarrah, Manjimup. Located 3 km east of Manjimup near the golf course. It was seriously damaged by vandals about 1965 but in true regal fashion it survived.

King Jarrah, King Tree Road, Collie. This tree is situated about 2 km east of Wellington Mill settlement, and is the largest jarrah tree recorded in the Collie Division. It has a total height of 46 m, a girth of 7 m and a volume of 57 m^3.

King Jarrah, Nanga Brook. Located about 5 km south of the now abandoned Nanga Brook townsite (it was destroyed by fire in January 1961) and is a magnificent tree. Its height is 49 m, its girth 7 m and its volume 62 m^3.

The Four Aces. This group of four karri trees occurs near One Tree Bridge, Manjimup, and probably arose from a wildfire that burnt an old fallen log, a hundred or more years ago. They can therefore be described as "dream time regeneration". The tallest tree in the group stands 79 m tall with a girth of 5 m at the base.