

Plant a Tree
By Carolee James

In 1854, Pioneer J. Sterling Morton moved into the Nebraska Territory from Detroit, Michigan. Lovers of nature, he and his wife soon filled their property with many trees, shrubs and flowers. Morton was a journalist and became editor of Nebraska's first newspaper, where he published agriculture information, along with his enthusiasm for trees.



Japanese maple. Photo: Pixabay, Stux/7249images

In January 1872, after becoming secretary of the Nebraska Territory, Morton proposed a tree-planting holiday to be called Arbor Day. Today, the most common date for state observances is the last Friday in April. This year, it is April 30th.

On National Arbor Day will you be planting a tree? I can imagine that some of you might think it's rather redundant to plant more trees when we are already surrounded by so many beautiful native trees. But here are a few statistics that might change your mind. Each year one acre of trees absorbs the amount of carbon produced by driving a car 26,000 miles! Children who have a view of greenery perform better at school. Businesses on tree-lined streets have 12% more sales. Residential properties increase in value by 5-20% with trees on the property.

You might consider a tree as a focal point for a particular area in your garden. Or you may also want to add spring or fall color to your landscape with a tree that has colorful foliage or beautiful blossoms. Here are a few choices to consider.

My all-time favorite for leaf color in spring, summer and fall is the Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*). The choices are endless...from dwarfs to 9' trees, and leaf colors ranging from pale greens to burgundies and everything in between. They withstand our temperatures and do well in pots or in the ground.

I also like the flowering plum (*Prunus cerasifera*, 'Krauter Vesuvius') with its spring pink blossoms and dark purple leaves. Also consider the Chinese pistache tree (*Pistacia chinensis*). Its fall color is a wonderful orange to red and it tolerates our soils and requires little water. For a blast of color in the autumn, there is the *Ginkgo biloba* with its fan-shaped leaves that are light green in the spring and summer and turn gold in the fall.

For beautiful, large tulip-like white to pink to purplish red flowers in the spring the tulip tree (*Magnolia soulangeana*) is spectacular. So is the flowering - pink, white, lavender, red - crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). This tree loves our hot summers. I will be planting a copper beech tree (*Fagus sylvatica*, 'Purpurea') for Arbor day. It will be planted down a hill away from the house where it will have room to grow, and we'll have a wonderful view of the deep reddish leaves from our deck.

But... don't even consider the following trees for any part of your landscape. They are invasive... plant one and in a few years, you'll have dozens that out-compete native trees!

- Tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*).
- The empress tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*)
- Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
- Chinese tallow tree (*Sapium sebiferum*)

Planting a tree to celebrate Arbor Day would be fine, but also consider planting a tree to celebrate a birth, a wedding, a friend, a new pet or for no reason at all. Just think of the beauty that the trees will bring to your garden.

Carolee James was a past University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County who moved to the Delta.

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