

Zoo to You column for Garden City Telegram

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Topic: Celebrating Trees

April 28, 2017, is National Arbor Day. It's the one day of the year set aside to celebrate the trees that give us so much. We can thank trees for tree houses and rope swings, leaves for school projects as well as leaves to pile up and jump into. Trees are wonderful! Trees provide shade on those hot summer days. Apricots, apples, pecans, ...many trees provide us with fruits or nuts to eat. Trees provide shelter from the wind and rain. They also provide wood for fire, furniture, and houses among other things.

The benefits of trees that are listed above are the easy ones to identify, but trees benefit us a lot more than you may realize. Trees help clean the air we breathe. In 2013 the U.S. Forest Service reported that in Greater Kansas City, trees were removing 26,000 tons of air pollution each year. Trees also provide us with oxygen and have been called the "lungs of the planet". One large tree can provide a day's supply of oxygen for up to four people, according to a North Carolina State University study. Trees actually take CO₂ out of the atmosphere to make oxygen as a by-product of photosynthesis. CO₂ in the atmosphere traps heat closer to the Earth. By processing it out of the atmosphere, trees help keep things just a little bit cooler.

Trees naturally filter water. The water supply for New York City is largely filtered by upstate New York forests, requiring minimal additional filtering. Trees help control erosion, reducing the amount of silt that enters our waterways and helping to protect fish habitat. They help absorb heavy rains reducing runoff. Ever notice that it's cooler around a number of trees than in the middle of an asphalt and concrete jungle? Trees have a cooling effect from evaporating water. Trees can also reduce the air conditioning, as well as heating, needs of a building when positioned properly.

Homes with trees in the yard are proven to sell quicker and at a higher value than treeless homes. Studies have shown that neighborhoods with lots of trees have reduced crime rates. And just as being out in nature has been proven to reduce stress, simply having a tree you can see outside your window at work has also been shown to be beneficial to your mental health.

Trees also provide homes for wildlife. Tree squirrels, woodpeckers, spider monkeys, koalas, sloths, orangutans, macaws, and many other animals are adapted to an arboreal life. They spend most of their

time in the trees. That's where they eat, sleep and play. Forests are actually home to eighty percent of the planet's land animals and plants.

National Arbor Day is the last Friday of April each year. Arbor Day may have started in Nebraska, but it has spread well beyond the Cornhusker State and the United States. Other countries such as Iceland, Israel, Australia, Yugoslavia, India, and Japan also have days or even weeks celebrating trees. Whether you plant a new tree or tend to an existing one, whether it's on Arbor Day or another day during the year, join in the tree celebration. Planting and protecting trees benefits us all.