

# Going Green

Communities throughout Illinois celebrate an American tradition dating to 1887: Arbor Day.

Story By Reinee Hildebrandt and Kathy Andrews

**A**rbor Day is Julius Sterling Morton's most recognized accomplishment and legacy.

Born in Michigan in 1832, the Nebraska journalist and politician knew the value of trees. The winds were fierce at his Nebraska home, and he knew trees would redirect and slow the Grand Prairie winds. When he served as President Grover Cleveland's Secretary of Agriculture, Morton worked to improve agricultural techniques throughout the United States. On April 10, 1872 Morton held the first Arbor Day in Nebraska, a day when more than 1 million trees were planted.



Morton's idea of an Arbor Day swept the nation.

Illinois' first Arbor Day was held in 1887, but not until 1949 did the state legislature legally declare the last Friday in April as "Arbor and Bird Day." The purpose of the legislation was to plant trees, shrubs and vines about homes, along the highways and on public grounds to show the value of trees and birds and the necessity of their protection, thus contributing to the comforts and attractions of our state.

Included in the founding premise of Arbor and Bird Day is the need to conduct appropriate exercises in public schools and elsewhere, involving the citizens of Illinois in this important practice. School children in the Village of Mount Prospect participate in an annual tree-planting ceremony, and anxiously await hearing Mayor Irvana K. Wilks recite the poem that she penned to commemorate the event.

**'Greenspire' Littleleaf Linden**  
(*Tilia cordata* 'Greenspire')

By Irvana K. Wilks

*In the time-honored tradition  
marking Arbor Day  
we plant a tree, a 'Greenspire'  
Littleleaf Linden,  
covering its roots with rich, brown  
Illinois soil.*

## Additional Information

**H**istory of Arbor Day [www.arborday.net](http://www.arborday.net)

National Arbor Day Foundation (list of state Arbor Day events, Right Tree Right Place, list of Illinois TREE CITY USA Communities) [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)

Ten Things You Can Do on Arbor Day, 10 Things Teachers Can Do on Arbor Day and a variety of activity pages [www.idahoforests.org/arborday](http://www.idahoforests.org/arborday)

Morton Arboretum's Celebrate Arbor Day in Your Community and Tree Planting Guide [www.mortonarb.org](http://www.mortonarb.org)