Planting trees can be YOUR superpower in 2022! Create beauty, save money, and help build a better planet simply by planting trees. And why not start this Arbor Day?

Arbor Day, which is traditionally celebrated on the last Friday in April, was founded by J. Sterling Morton in 1872. Morton was a Nebraska newspaper editor who had a deep love for trees and strongly advocated for more tree plantings. In 1858 he was appointed Secretary of the Nebraska Territory and later as the United States Secretary of Agriculture by President Cleveland in 1893.

Morton proposed, April 10, 1872, as the date for the first Arbor Day in Nebraska and it was adopted by the State Board of Agriculture. The Board awarded premiums for the largest number of trees properly planted that day. It is estimated, more than one million trees were planted in Nebraska on the first Arbor Day. At Morton’s own estate, two hundred Elms, Ash, and Linden trees were planted. In 1885, Arbor Day was named a legal state holiday in Nebraska and April 22nd was selected for the permanent annual observance. Almost 100 years later, in 1970, President Richard Nixon proclaimed the last Friday in April as National Arbor Day.

Today, all 50 states celebrate Arbor Day. In Florida, we celebrate Arbor Day on the third Friday in January. This is because many trees are dormant (not actively growing) this time of year, especially more temperate species that are planted in central and north Florida, and so experience less stress during transplant. Less stress to the tree, increases its chances of survival. Here in the Keys, dormancy is not so much of a factor and many celebrations happen in April to take advantage of much...
Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

- Shelly presented new techniques for habitat restoration to the Sea Grant representatives from North Carolina through Florida at the regional meeting in Savannah, Georgia.
- Shelly was invited to participate in the EPA training to prepare a quality assurance project plan for data collection for the grant awarded for Florida Keys Sponge Reproduction Research, Community Outreach, and Identification Guide to Improve Restoration Outcomes Florida Keys.
- Shelly is working on a joint Florida Sea Grant and FWC project for the second year entitled “Improving Management and Harvest Practices in the Florida Stone Crab Fishery,” which will entail a public workshop and more stakeholder input in 2022.

Michelle recently accomplished the following activities:

- Master Gardener Volunteers installed the second wildflower demonstration garden at Crane Point Hammock in Marathon. The wildflower garden was planted around The Red Nun art installation project as part of the Florida Keys Sculpture Trail. It features 25 different species native to the Florida Keys.
- 51 Master Gardener Volunteers contributed over 2,600 hours of volunteer service in 2021. This represents the most volunteer hours recorded since the horticulture agent, Michelle Mularz, took over the program in 2018. Service hours included one-on-one outreach with homeowners through plant clinics and site visits, giving presentations, maintaining demonstration gardens, writing articles and fact sheets, youth outreach, and more.

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Alicia recently accomplished the following activities:

- Alicia organized train the trainer workshops for Extension agents and county staff to learn about how to offer the Climate Smart Floridians Program. These workshops will take place in March and April.

- Alicia participated in the Association of Climate Change Officers, Climate Change Practitioners Annual Leadership Summit. She served as a panel speaker, moderator and provided technology support.

- Alicia served on the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, Climate Change Priority Implementation Team. This team met to develop and framework for building Extension’s capacity to collaborate on local climate change issues with our stakeholders.

- Alicia serves on the Community Ration System, Program for Public Information. In December, they started the process of reviewing and adapting the hazard outreach material and reviewing and adding new partnerships.

A healthy urban tree canopy provides many benefits. One benefit we can all appreciate as our summer temperatures continue to set records every year, is the cooling effect trees have by providing shade and releasing water vapor into the air through their leaves. Properly planted shade trees around a home, have the potential to save over 30% of residential peak cooling demand on a summer day. Likewise, evapotranspiration, the transfer of moisture from the earth and plants to the atmosphere, can reduce peak summer temperatures by 2 to 9 degrees. This translates into reduced energy use for air conditioning (money savings) and improved air quality. Another way urban trees can have a positive impact on climate is through carbon storage. Urban trees in the United States store 708 million tons of carbon, about 12 percent of annual U.S. carbon emissions.

Trees also help clean our air and provide us with oxygen... talk about superpowers. A study done in the United Kingdom in 2013 showed greater than 50 percent reduction of particulate matter inside homes recently screened with young roadside birch trees. Airborne particulate pollution has been associated with premature mortality and inflammatory illnesses. Additionally, a study done by the U.S. Forest Service found that urban trees in the Greater Kansas City region remove 26,000 tons of air pollution each year. Not to mention the increase in property value and positive correlation of sale prices when trees were located within 500 feet homes.

Whether we know it or not, trees provide us with numerous financial, health, ecological, environmental, and aesthetic benefits. This Arbor Day, join the millions of people that have already committed to planting a tree, and start maximizing your potential benefits. Happy planting!

For more information on the data shared in this article, please contact our office.
The Wildflower Demonstration Garden located at the Gato Historical Building in Key West, won a significant statewide award from the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program as Outstanding Demonstration Garden for 2021. The garden features over 60 plant species native to the Florida Keys, plant identification markers, educational signs throughout the garden that also include a QR code that directs visitors to fact sheets on plants in the garden, and compost bins. In 2022, we will be adding native bee houses and a seed library to give Monroe County residents access to native wildflower seeds.