

This should be our month

What is the true meaning of Earth Day? And what about Arbor Day? The answers really depend on one's personal perspective.

I think of parades with causes on big poster boards, and a mix of environmental advocates, students, and parents with baby strollers. I asked my daughter and her two friends, all sophomores in high school, what they think of Arbor Day and Earth Day. Let's just say their responses were interesting.

One girl said that nobody really knows when the earth was born, so she guessed having an Earth Day (akin to a birthday) was cool. Maybe she would make up a card or something. The second girl asked whether kids get the day off from school — I responded no. She curtly replied that it is a not a real thing then.

Now to my Carolyn Rose: She said Earth Day is when we celebrate our blue planet and hippies tell us how we are doing it wrong. Oh boy! Instantly, I could feel my wife's cold, hard judgmental stare — directed not at my daughter, but at me.

What I told them is that the nursery industry is a solution for the problems Earth Day and Arbor Day are trying to bring to attention. We grow environmentally beneficial plants and trees.

My daughter then asked: Why don't we see nurseries through the country owning it? Why don't we dominate the month of April? Good question, kid. But first, some background.

Arbor Day

National Arbor Day is traditionally celebrated the last Friday in April (April 27 this year), but various states observe the tree-planting day based on climate and weather — it has to be warm enough to plant trees. The good news? This day is about as “pro tree” as you can get.

J. Sterling Morton founded Arbor Day 146 years ago with the simple idea of setting aside a day for tree planting. This effort spans communities, schools and parks and public gathering spaces.

Earth Day

First celebrated in 1970, Earth Day

is always April 22. Events are held in more than 193 countries to promote environmental protection.

Gaylord Nelson was the father of the Earth Day movement and served as governor and United States senator from Wisconsin. Sen. Nelson passed away in 2005, but he is seen as a force in pushing for environmental activism even to this day. He was instrumental in the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Nurseries can make a difference

In a sea of concrete and steel, New York City set a goal of planting one million trees. It was one of the largest urban canopy efforts ever undertaken. Some 11 years later, that wise investment in the community sets an example for cities and states all over the country to follow. The nursery industry is poised to provide trees for this purpose.

Improving a city's urban tree canopy can have numerous benefits, including reducing summer peak temperatures and air pollution, enhancing property values, providing wildlife habitat, providing aesthetic benefits, and improving social ties among neighbors. A robust tree canopy can also attract businesses and residents.

Scientists now have the ability to qualify and quantify the benefits of urban tree canopy, using the Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) Assessment suite of tools.

The benefits of planting trees and shrubs are known and well promoted, not only through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but within our own industry.

The Plant Something campaign — an organic marketing and education effort by 23 states and the Canadian Nursery Association — is now six years old. We're sharing what we know, and what we know is pretty simple. Plants purify our water and nourish ecosystems. They save energy for businesses and homes. They encourage good health. And no matter whether the plants are inside or outside, they reduce air pollution. The OAN created its own campaign to promote these benefits. It's called Plants Make Life Better and you can find the materials at www.plantsomethingoregon.com/pmlb.

Being the solution

There are opportunities for the nursery and greenhouse industry to be a source of



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mitigation for greenhouse gas emissions. A warmer climate creates challenges to growing conditions in our state and opens doorways to pest and diseases never contemplated. This threat has also given nursery growers the opportunity to show the way and help solve the challenges that we as a society face.

A few years ago, the OAN created the Climate Friendly Nurseries Project (CFNP), which was the first of its kind in the nation. This project partnered with nurseries to help them measure and reduce energy, resource use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while achieving greater economic efficiency and profitability.

At the conclusion of the three-year project, participating nurseries reduced their GHG emissions by an average of 20 percent. *Best Management Practices for Climate-Friendly Nurseries*, a guide developed through the project, provided recommendations and case studies and identified funding sources and technical resources to assist with the energy and resource-efficiency upgrades.

Answering the call

So as we celebrate in the month of April, Earth Day is an opportunity to leverage green goods to promote an environmental ethic and make a difference in our home, neighborhood and state. It is also an opportunity for me to take three high school sophomore girls out and plant a tree and introduce them to Arbor Day.

Here is where the nursery industry can help simply by doing what it does best — growing plants and trees. Over the next couple of years, let's make April our month to shine! ☺