

Maskenthine Lake Arboretum – Revisited

By: Pam Bergstrom, Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District Forester

If you take HWY 275 out east of Norfolk and go till you reach a sign that says ‘Maskenthine Lake’ you will turn and head to the south about 2 and a half miles, past a sign that read ‘Maskenthine Main Entrance’ and you will come upon another sign on the west side of the road that reads ‘Maskenthine Lake’. Follow that short road to the west until you are in a parking lot surrounded by trees. You have arrived at my favorite place at Maskenthine – Maskenthine Lake Arboretum.

People often ask me, what is an Arboretum? Well, to do a quick and dirty definition, it is a tree museum where people can get up close and see what trees look like and several of the trees planted here are not native. While some are, one of the purposes of an Arboretum is to see how far we can take tree and shrub species out of their native zones and move them to different parts of the country and even the world.

Now, I have sent many people to this Arboretum on assignments because they want to plant a new tree in their yard or windbreak and want to know what will it look like, does it shed a lot of leaves, do the leaves hang on all winter long, what do the flowers (if there are any) look like, and the questions go on. I could try to explain everything to them, but it is best to send them to this site for them to look at the trees first hand and see with their own eyes what this tree will look like. You can answer the questions: what does Northern Catalpa’s flowers smell like in the spring, do Bald Cypress really drop their needles in the fall, and what color does a Tupelo Tree’s leaves turn in the fall?

Most of the trees are identified with labels to tell you what the common name is and what the Latin or scientific name is. You will also find memorial trees out there in memory of people who

contributed to the Lower Elkhorn NRD or to Maskenthine Lake. Now, if you go over to the other side of the lake you will find some more memorial trees that are planted at the RV Camping Site.

Maskenthine Lake Arboretum is good sized so if you plan to come out for a visit it is best to bring good walking shoes, water, and sunscreen. Now, for those of you getting ready to take Senior Pictures, Engagement Pictures, or Family Photos think about coming out to the Arboretum and use the lush, green scenery as a great backdrop.

The Maskenthine Lake Arboretum is also a great educational tool to help students, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, FFA Chapters, and 4H Clubs learn how to identify trees and shrubs. If you happen to be a horticulture major or even a potential forestry major, a trip out to Maskenthine Lake Arboretum will give you a foot up on identifying your main trees of Nebraska.

Now, if you are looking at buying a tree and want to use the Arboretum as a study guide to figure out what tree will suit your space, it is best to visit the Arboretum during the different seasons, so you can get an idea what the tree will look like through out the year. It also gives you an idea if the tree will hold onto the leaves during the winter and then drop them before the new leaves emerge, what kind of seeds the tree will drop, and if the fragrance from the flowers will bother your allergies.

In closing, I will have to say good bye. As of the close of business on June 14, 2019 I will no longer be the Lower Elkhorn NRD Forester. I have been offered and accepted a position with the State of South Dakota Department of Agriculture in the Mitchell, South Dakota Field Office as a Field Forester. I have enjoyed these last 9 years and it has been my pleasure helping so many of you with your windbreak designs and plantings, doing sick tree visits, and helping communities throughout the district.



This sign will welcome you to the Maskenthine Lake Arboretum.



The plaque that identifies a Red Pine. Red Pine is not native to Nebraska, but they 3 that were planted at Maskenthine were doing so well until the tornado of 2014 hit. Now we are down to one. They are a gorgeous tree to behold but a slow growing pine.



A close picture of the long Red Pine Needles and medium sized cones. Red Pine was a favorite for Christmas Trees but now the firs and spruces are getting more attention.



Here is a marker that is in front of the memorial tree to honor Lloyd Nellor who was on the Board of Directors for the Lower Elkhorn NRD. Lloyd sadly passed away shortly after he stepped down from the board. Photos by Pam Bergstrom at Maskenthine Lake Arboretum.