

# Seedlings for Students

***By: Pam Bergstrom, Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District Forester***

In my mother's front yard is a Colorado Blue Spruce. That spruce is a magnificent tree and is a landmark in our landscape out on the farm. This tree has been there since my parents bought the property back in 1980. You see, that Colorado Blue Spruce was an Arbor Day tree that the previous owner's daughter brought home from school back in the late 1970s. Now, it is a full-grown mature tree that produces its own spruce cones, provides habitat for wildlife, and gives shade to our driveway during the hot summer months. The previous owners commented to us how beautiful this tree has become and how small and delicate it had been when it came home in their daughter's backpack all those years ago. Sadly, this summer I was spraying some herbicide around the tree and though I thought I was careful, some herbicide drifted onto the tree and some of the branches have died, but I am confident as new growth comes on it will crowd out the dead branches and be restored to its former glory! And I will be careful with herbicides when spraying around trees.

Back in the early 1990s, I got to partake in my first Arbor Day Celebration! My two-room school house in Brunswick, Nebraska journeyed to Plainview, Nebraska where we got to listen to a speaker talk about the importance of trees, the history of Arbor Day, and what products come from trees! At the end of the presentation they handed us a tree to take home and to plant. When I got the 'stick' that was my Arbor Day Tree home that evening, I had to show my parents this little seedling that would grow to be a tall, regal tree someday. The problem was there was no tag of the tree so we (my family) didn't know what it was for the longest time, but it turned out to be a Siberian Pea Shrub or Caragana which is really a shrub and not a tree, even though we pruned it like a tree because that is what we thought it was or that is what I was convinced it was. We planted it in our backyard and it thrived for years until 2006 when I was off to forestry school at the University of Missouri – Columbia when I received a phone

call from my father. My beloved Arbor Day Tree (Shrub) had broken off at the base due to a nasty ice storm that had come through in April. I babied that stump all summer long hoping that something would sprout from it, but nothing grew. I shed a tear for my fallen friend, but that little shrub taught me about responsibilities because I had to water 'her' and take care of 'her', so 'she' would grow. When I became a forester, I decided I wanted to get involved with Arbor Day Presentations and to also hand out trees (or shrubs) to students, so they could learn the same responsibilities that I learned from that Caragana shrub.

The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District has a program called "Seedlings for Students" and every year, schools and other organizations order these free seedlings to be distributed to the students to take home and to plant in their own yards, windbreaks, or take over to a family member's house that has a bigger yard. This is a great program to get more trees planted into the landscapes whether in town or out in the country. Also, it teaches kids about responsibility regarding watering the tree once a week or as needed and keeping lawnmowers away from the seedling (lawnmowers are the mortal enemies of seedlings). I often encourage the kids to name their trees and take photos of the tree as it grows or to stand by the tree every Arbor Day and watch as they grow along with the tree. Remember that Colorado Blue Spruce in my mom's front yard, I call him Bruce the Spruce.

Through "Seedlings for Students," this year's tree is the Colorado Blue Spruce. A non-native to Nebraska, Colorado Blue Spruce or just Blue Spruce, needs full sunlight and does best on well drained sites that are high up and won't be threatened with flooding or ponding. The Blue Spruce can be a little touchy when it comes to the winter winds and can get what is known as winter burn or wind burn. If the Blue Spruce is healthy enough, it can snap itself out of it and be fine or it can stay brown and start to become susceptible to other insects or diseases. So, in short it is best to plant this tree in a protected site/area.

To learn more about “Seedlings for Students, or to order some seedlings” contact Julie Wragge the Information and Education Coordinator with the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District at 402.371.7313 or email your order to [lenrd@lenrd.org](mailto:lenrd@lenrd.org)



Planting a tree, like this Colorado Blue Spruce, is a great way to celebrate Arbor Day. Picture from <https://uvmbored.com/event/arborday-tree-planting/>.



Students in Denver, Colorado planting Colorado Blue Spruce trees at their school. Picture from <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/students-from-steck-elementary-helped-plant-six-blue-spruce-news-photo/161359131>



Future foresters at work? Picture from <https://backyardforkids.com/benefits-of-planting-trees-in-your-yard/>