

# From Seeds to Trees – Planting tree seeds with our future landowners

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

Every February or March, Dan Gillespie with the Madison County NRCS office and I go to the Battle Creek Public Schools and St. John's School in Battle Creek to talk with the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> graders about trees and plant tree seeds. We cover an array of tree topics such as how do trees communicate with each other, how do trees survive, and the different types of trees. When Dan started this program back in the 1980's, it was known as the "Dan the Tree Man Show" and now that I have become a co-anchor it has become the "Dan the Tree Man and Pam the Tree Lady Show."

We start the show off by talking about the importance of trees and how we benefit from trees and trees benefit from us. We usually go into how trees get nutrients and water up into their leaves and may food through the process photosynthesis and how that food then travels back down the tree to the various parts of the tree that need the food. We also talk about the 3 types of trees: Deciduous or Hardwoods that drop their leaves in the fall, Evergreens, Conifers, or Softwoods that have needles that are retained during the winter, and finally the third and strangest type of tree the Deciduous Evergreen such as a Bald Cypress that will drop their needles every fall and then regrow them in the spring.

We have added into our show talking about how trees communicate with each other and how some mother trees will intertwine their roots with their offspring and nourish them for the first few years of their lives. Also, since Dan is also known as the "No-Till Man" he also talks about no-tilling to the kids and the benefits that brings. What can I say, Dan is passionate about what he does!

At the end of the show, the kids get to choose 3 tree seeds to plant into grow boxes and then watch them grow. This year, we had a huge collection of tree seeds, many of them collected from right

here in northeast Nebraska! We had Red Oak collected from Battle Creek, Buckeyes collected from Maskenthine Lake over by Stanton, Ginkgo collected from Pierce, and varieties of maples collected from Battle Creek. Other seeds included Shumard Oak from northern Missouri and Hickory Hybrids from southeast Nebraska. For many of the students, this is the highlight of the show, getting their hands 'dirty' and planting their 3 seeds. Although, many kids would love to take a seed of each of the species, but the boxes aren't big enough and we have only so many seeds to go around.

Dan and I visited Battle Creek Public Schools back in February and I am happy to report that the Buckeyes and the oaks are sprouting!

I have also 'branched' out and started my own 'show' that I call "Seed What Grows" and I have gone into just a handful of classrooms during the winter to plant these seeds with students, mainly elementary students.



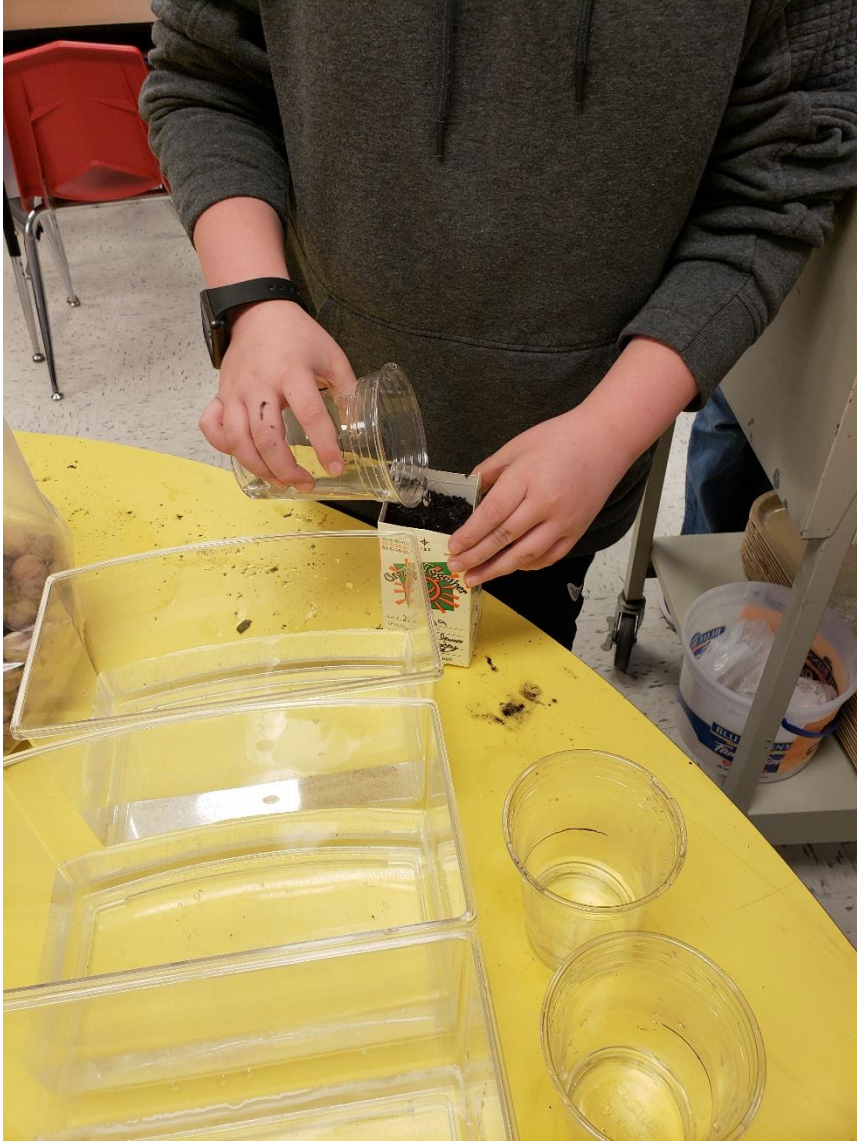
Dan talking to the students about the importance of soil health to the seedlings.



From seed to seedling! This is a Northern Red Oak that was collected from Battle Creek.



Putting the seeds on top of the soil.



A little water goes a long way with these grow boxes!



Picking out only 3 seeds can be a challenge!



The finished product!