

# Memorial Trees

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

Memorial Day Weekend has come and gone! But do we know the true meaning of Memorial Day other than a time for families to gather and say goodbye to the winter we just had? Memorial Day is truly a time to be thankful for the country we live in and for those who sacrificed their lives so we may have our freedom. Is there a better way to remember the lives of those who have served and given up all they had so we could be better off than plastic flowers that will be gone with the first gust of wind? Well, I am glad you asked!

This time of year, I get the question that is really something I can't answer, only people who know the person for whom the tree or shrub is being planted for can answer. That question is, "what tree should I plant in honor of my family member or friend?" In reply, I ask, "was there ever a tree or even a shrub that defines who that person was?" Let me give some examples. Is it for a World War II Veteran who would take lazy strolls to be near a bur oak where he would share a bag of peanuts with the local varmints ... I mean squirrels? Was she a nurse from the Korean War who wrote in her letters that she would walk with her patients in a local garden and they would eat the strange fruit of the Asian persimmon (yes, we have a persimmon native to America). Never forget the newest generation to serve their country. Was there a soldier who mentioned in his letters from Iraq to home how he would love to taste the fruit of the mulberry and lay under its shade in a freshly mowed alfalfa pasture.

I have honestly had family members approach me and ask for me to find a mulberry tree to plant in honor of a loved one who loved to walk out to the old tree grove and feast on the fruit before dinner. Or, the World War II Veteran's widow who wanted lilac planted in honor of her husband because it was a bouquet of lilacs he held when he returned home to her. The stories of why people select the trees or shrubs they do in honor of their loved ones are just as inspiring as the people for whom they are planted for.

A new trend that has started is called Service Trees and this would be a great thing for those young men and women who are going to start their military career this summer. On the day they are to leave for boot camp, the family will gather and plant a tree and the thought is as the tree grows and takes root, so does the person whom it was planted for. Again, a tree or shrub with significance to that person should be chosen.

The next question I get is where this tree should be planted. Contact your loved ones' VFW, church, local park board/tree board, or school where the person attended to see if they would be willing to add the plant to their grounds. When you look at the location, just make sure it is somewhere with meaning and has plenty of room for the tree or shrub to grow.

My father was a Vietnam Veteran and lost his fight with prostate cancer in 2014. For my father's two memorial trees, one tree, a Hill's Oak, was planted at the Northeast Arboretum at the Northeast

Research Center outside of Concord, Nebraska because my father was passionate about agriculture and he was interested in the research that was being done in agronomy, livestock production, and environmental protection/enhancement. The second tree is a Bur Oak that was planted at the park in Brunswick, Nebraska because that was the community where he went to church, had morning coffee, and sent his children to the elementary school too. Why the oaks? Well, in the Sara Evan's song 'Born to Fly' she talks about her dad being grounded like the oak tree and my dad was a very grounded man. It is a song that I cherish and one that I caught my dad singing along to a time or two. Also, he enjoyed oak trees and he was part of my inspiration to go into forestry.

"There's a very special garden where the trees of memory grow, nurtured by the kindness and concern that good friends show." ~ Anonymous



Hill's Oak at the Northeast Nebraska Research Center near Concord, Nebraska that was planted in memory of Francis Bergstrom in spring of 2016.



The plaque that sits at the base of the Hill's Oak that was planted in the spring of 2016 in memory of Francis Bergstrom at the Northeast Research Center near Concord, Nebraska.