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Earth Day and Month – A Wisconsin Legacy, A Global Call to Action

<https://www.earthday.org/>

Did you know Earth Month has deep roots in Wisconsin history? In fact, Earth Day itself—celebrated each year on April 22—was the brainchild of Wisconsin’s own Gaylord Nelson, former Governor and U.S. Senator. His vision sparked a nationwide environmental movement that lives on today, and his legacy is honored through the Nelson Institute for Environmental

Studies at UW–Madison. As we observe Earth Month here in Fitchburg, we're proud to carry forward this tradition of environmental leadership.



Earth Month is more than a nod to the past—it's a crucial moment to reflect on our shared future. Climate change driven by global warming is accelerating, and with it come wide-reaching impacts like rising ocean levels, significant changes to regional weather patterns, severe shifts between drought and flood, and ecosystem disruption that impacts millions of animal and plant species as well as the ecosystem services and natural resources on which humans depend. Beyond climate change, our still-growing population's increasing demands on the planet are resulting in myriad other planetary strains such as deforestation, desertification, depleting fisheries, threats to clean water and air, and loss of biodiversity. These global issues may often feel distant, but their effects bubble up close to home, from extreme local weather patterns to shifts in what animals and plants can succeed in our own changing local biome.

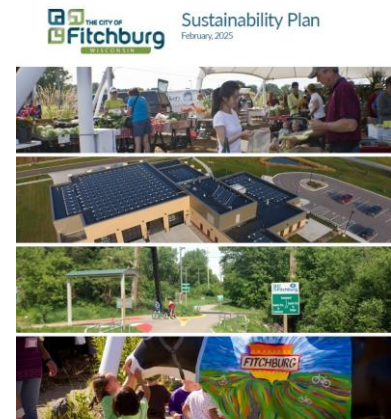
But we see numerous causes for optimism and celebration as well, from global climate protests and actions, to increasing corporate actions to reduce impact and conserve resources, to researchers unlocking promising advancements to help slow or even reverse some of our impacts on the world. This April, we encourage all residents to take time to engage with nature, reduce waste, conserve energy, and explore local sustainability efforts. Every small action counts when we act together for the planet.

Fitchburg Sustainability Plan Is Official!

<https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2369>

The Fitchburg Sustainability Plan was approved at the April 8, 2025 Common Council meeting by unanimous voice vote. With that vote, the City's first comprehensive, focused effort to improve sustainability and tackle the ongoing threat of climate change is officially a guiding document for Fitchburg.

The latest version of the plan is available on the City's website at <https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/2877/Fitchburg-Sustainability-Plan>, and additional documents and information can be found there as well. If you have questions or comments, feel free to reach out to sustainability@fitchburgwi.gov.



Earth Day/Month Activities in Fitchburg

<https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2025/>

2025 Earth Day and Month Events:

1. **[Biennial Shred/Recycling Event](#)** – Fitchburg will again be hosting an April shred and recycling event. Bring your confidential papers and used electronic devices to City Hall Saturday April 12, to be shredded and recycled! The event runs from 8am to 11am. Click the link for details.
2. **[Fitchburg Waterway Cleanups](#)** – Join your neighbors in this annual Earth Month tradition in Fitchburg, helping to pick up trash and make a local waterway just a little cleaner and more beautiful, this year on Saturdays April 19 and 26 (see link for details and locations).
3. **[Earth Day Workday at Chicory Meadows Park](#)** – On Tuesday, April 22, starting at 10am, you can join City staff and other volunteers at Chicory Meadows Park (park at 5772 Auburn Drive if driving) to help plant 18 trees and shrubs that were purchased with funding from the Alliant Energy One Million Trees program. Wear sturdy shoes, outdoor work clothes and work gloves, and bring any *clean* equipment that could help make the work easier (shovels, trowels, root saws, and rakes).
4. **[Participate in EarthFest 2025 with UW's Nelson Institute](#)** – The Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison hosts Earth Day events each year, and recent years have seen a transition to virtual events that allow for a greater variety of ways to participate. See <https://earthfest.wisc.edu/> for details, and set aside some time from April 21-29 to join some of the events!

Prepare for Low-Mow May

<https://www.fitchburgwi.gov/2861/Natural-Lawns-and-Low-Mow-May>

Join your Fitchburg neighbors this Spring as "Low-Mow May" returns to Fitchburg for a third consecutive year. Common Council will vote on a Resolution later in April to designate May 2025 as Low-Mow May in Fitchburg and temporarily suspend the City's lawn maintenance ordinance until June 1st. Register to participate at [this link](#).

As more natural spaces are developed and wilderness increasingly partitioned into smaller and less contiguous parcels, many animal and plant species are facing pressures due to habitat loss and population fragmentation. For pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and beetles, as well as countless other invertebrate species, these developed spaces now serve as a vital part of their habitats, with property owners' use of native plant species in landscaping and gardening an important source of shelter and foraging options.

Most Wisconsinites are familiar with the European honeybee, perhaps the most popular and well-known insect on the planet, but our state is home to hundreds of other local bees, butterflies, moths, and other insects vital to our local ecosystems and food crop pollination. Abundant food and shelter options help these species as they emerge in Spring, and providing native plant species offers the habitat they sorely need to thrive. For many property owners, those native plant species already exist in lawns, so providing habitat can be as simple as eliminating or reducing the use of lawnmowers for the first several weeks of Spring, allowing flowers to grow where normally mowers would cut them down.

Register at <https://fitchburgwi.portal.opengov.com/categories/1081/record-types/6463> if you'd like to take part in Low-Mow May 2025.



Spring Tree Care

From Sue Fieber with Fitchburg's Tree Advisory Committee

Winter is a relatively slow time when it comes to yards and gardens. "Trees and shrubs are dormant," said Anna Healy, Fitchburg Urban Forester and Naturalist, "so this is a good time to prune them if needed."

Spring means the end of dormancy. Photosynthates (sugars), which have been stored in the roots during the winter, return to the branches, and leaves begin to sprout. "Once this

happens, it's too late for pruning," Healy said. "Pruning too late in the spring will do more harm than good, so if you haven't gotten around to trimming your trees, it's best to just wait until next winter."

When spring arrives, the first thing to do is evaluate what's happened over the winter. For instance, our area has been short of rain/snow since last fall. And because of icy conditions, a lot of salt has been used on roads and walkways, and the excess has gone more deeply into the soil. As trees come out of dormancy, they will need a good soaking, both to rehydrate them and to wash out the salt residue. This is especially important for conifers, because they respire all winter.

To thoroughly water trees and shrubs, the best method is NOT to spray them with a hose, Healy said. Rather, she recommends setting your hose to a trickle and letting it run at the base of the tree for half an hour or so. This will be sufficient to hydrate small shrubs. For larger shrubs and small trees, move the hose to several locations. This is more time consuming but it ensures that the roots on all sides of the trees will get the moisture they need.

Healy also pointed out that insect pests are NOT dormant in winter. So it's important to examine your outdoor areas to determine whether pest treatment will be needed in spring.

Once your trees are well hydrated, the next thing to do is mulch them out to the drip line. This keeps moisture in the soil longer, helps protect against insect pests, and ensures that lawn mowers and other mechanical tools will not damage the base of the trees. Two to three inches of mulch is enough, Healy said, and she cautioned against mulching too close to the trunk. "Mulch volcanoes" are to be avoided; mulching against a tree trunk promotes rot and insect damage, which in extreme cases can actually kill a tree.

Spring is also a great time to introduce new native trees and shrubs to your landscape. Natives are best, because they are most likely to be successful in our soil and weather conditions. Healy pointed out that there are several nearby sources of quality native trees and shrubs. These include the Bruce Company in Madison, McKay Nursery Company in Oregon, and Johnson's Nursery in Menomonee. Another good source is the Cambridge Tree Project (cambridgetreeproject.org). This small nonprofit sells many native shrubs and small trees and uses the proceeds to provide trees to the local community (over 1,100 trees so far...).

Planting trees correctly is important, Healy said. For example, vegetable gardeners are used to planting their tomatoes deeply, but the same strategy is not advisable for trees. Planting trees too deeply will keep them from thriving. For much more information about trees and tree care, visit the [Parks and Forestry](#) section of the City of Fitchburg website.

Finally, spring is a good time to check your outdoor areas for garlic mustard and other invasives that may have crept in over the winter. They are easy to remove in spring. And to further enhance your landscape, consider planting shade-tolerant native perennials around the



base of your trees and shrubs. Although annual flowering plants like petunias are colorful, Healy says they are to be avoided, because they are not useful to native pollinators. Again, there are many sources of high-quality native perennials in our area. In addition to local greenhouses, The Flower Factory sells at the Farmer’s Market around the Capital Square beginning in April. Just be careful that you are actually getting native species. Another good source is the UW Arboretum tent sale, held in early May; this popular event offers only natives, and knowledgeable helpers are on site to provide advice and recommendations. Check the Arboretum website for details (<https://arboretum.wisc.edu>).

Arbor Day, which occurs in April each year, is a holiday devoted to tree planting. This year, Arbor Day falls on April 25, and many communities will hold tree planting events on or around that date. Fitchburg, which has earned the designation of Tree City of the World, will hold two Arbor Day celebrations on Saturday, April 26, one at the Sunnyside Dog Park from 9 to 11 a.m. and the other at Huetle-Jamestown Park from 10 a.m. to noon. Community members are invited to learn about and help with tree planting. Volunteers are asked to bring water and wear gloves.

Celebrate the arrival of spring, and if you can, plant a tree!!

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<http://www.fitchburgwi.gov/list.aspx> > Green Fitchburg

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Please contact Phil Grupe, Sustainability Specialist, at phil.grupe@fitchburgwi.gov or (608) 270-4259, if you have any questions, comments, and/or suggestions for future Green E-News topics.

