



Fact Sheet

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania • Department of Environmental Protection

Learn About Earth Day Earth Day is Celebrated on April 22 Every Year

Earth Day is an annual observance, held on April 22, to increase public awareness of the environment. Each year on Earth Day, millions of people throughout the world gather to clean up litter, to draw attention to threats to the environment and to celebrate progress in reducing pollution.

Former U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin) is credited with being the founder of Earth Day. His idea for increasing environmental awareness began in the early 1960s as a suggestion to President John F. Kennedy that the president conduct a five-day conservation tour to bring environmental issues to the public's attention. This suggestion was made at a time when the public was hearing that the Great Lakes were dead, reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and learning of the misuse of pesticides and their devastating impacts to the environment and watching news reports of the first catastrophic oil spill from a supertanker (the grounding of the *Torrey Canyon* off the coast of New England).

Despite this appropriate climate, the senator's agenda moved slowly at first. Then, while the senator was touring the Western states speaking about conservation efforts, he thought about using the anti-war teach-in tactics of the day to bring more attention to environmental issues. In September 1969, Sen. Nelson announced that there would be a national environmental teach-in on college campuses and elsewhere in the spring of 1970. A law student, Denis Hayes, helped to organize one of these teach-ins after going to Washington, D.C., to interview Sen. Nelson. Hayes is still involved in the national Earth Day movement.

An overwhelming response helped to create that first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. It was estimated that 20 million people were involved. Folk singer Pete Seeger performed at the Washington Monument. In New York City, cars were banned from Fifth Avenue to accommodate events there. Public speeches, parades, marches, rallies and teach-ins on college campuses launched this

contemporary environmental movement. The first Earth Day was the largest focused demonstration in history at that time. The U.S. Congress closed its doors and many politicians went home to attend local events. The U.S. Congress responded, creating the Environmental Protection Agency and enacting numerous environmental laws to protect air, water, land and wildlife. Now, Earth Day is a globally celebrated effort to bring attention to the environment. You can read more about the history of Earth Day in Senator Gaylord Nelson's own words at web.mit.edu/bruceand/EarthDay95/history.html.

No one single organization "owns" Earth Day. Nationally, there are several organizations that have formed to promote Earth Day.

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has traditionally declared an Earth Day theme and assisted the Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education in distributing environmental education information to schools and others. DEP also maintains a calendar of Earth Day events. Across Pennsylvania, many agencies and organizations celebrate Earth Day with special events and activities.

For Earth Day 2002, DEP's theme is "Focus on Biodiversity." Educational products designed for the event include a poster which helps students understand the importance of natural diversity.

What You Can Do

1. When gardening, "**think native.**" Native perennials that grow naturally in Pennsylvania require less water, provide higher quality nectar for butterflies and other native insects. Daisies, black-eyed Susans and asters are examples of productive cultivated varieties. Host plants for caterpillars include: dill for black swallow-tails and milkweed for monarchs. Don't forget to compost food scraps, lawn clippings, leaves and other organic matter.

2. Free-roaming cats kill millions of animals annually – **“keep the cats indoors.”** Songbirds and ground-nesting upland game birds are especially vulnerable. Cats may also become the prey if there are coyotes in the area. Either way, it makes good sense to keep cats inside.
3. The Wild Resources Conservation Fund was established to give Pennsylvanians the opportunity to support the management of our wild resources. **“Support the fund.”** This can be done in three ways: Pennsylvania state tax check-off, purchase of the wildlife license plate (the river otter) or direct donation to: WRCF, P.O. Box 8764, Harrisburg, PA 17105.
4. Did you know that the root system in your lawn is as deep as the blades of grass are long? **“Grow your lawn’s grass a little taller.”** At 3-4 inches high, the weed seeds are shaded out and the roots reach deeper. That means fewer chemicals, if any, needed and in dry conditions the roots draw more water and the lawn is greener. If everyone did this, we would have cleaner, healthier watersheds and better looking lawns – seems like a win-win proposition.
5. Bug zappers do little to control pest insects. They attract them to your yard and kill harmless helpful insects like moths. **“Lose the zapper, welcome the bats.”** A single little brown bat can consume 600 mosquitoes in one hour of foraging. Bats hibernate from December through March, waking up in April to begin what we can look at as their bug management program. Install a bat box in February or March and they may stay and work for you all summer.
6. Many conservation organizations focus their efforts on one or more species of plants and animals listed as endangered in Pennsylvania. **“Adopt a species.”** Choose one of these

plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians or fishes - there are many to choose from: the spreading globeflower, the king rail, the Indiana bat, the bog turtle, the coastal plain leopard frog and the lake sturgeon, just to name a few. Search the Internet to find organizations that are working to improve the status of these species in Pennsylvania and learn what you can do to help.

Resources for Earth Day

“Earth Day Network” is a national effort focusing on cleaner energy. Visit the website at www.earthday.net to learn more.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency -- maintains an Earth Day homepage listing events and organizations at www.epa.gov/epapages/earthday/

All Species Project -- has ideas for organizing neighborhood events at www.allspecies.org/

National Parks and Conservation Association -- Learn how to become involved at your local national or state park at www.npca.org

DEP -- Pennsylvania’s environmental regulatory agency has free Earth Day products (while the supply lasts -- commonwealth residents only, please) and activities related to the theme. Visit our website at www.dep.state.pa (directLINK “Earth Day”). You may also call the Earth Day line at (717) 783-6397, write to us at P.O. Box 2063, Harrisburg, PA, 17105-2063 and visit the DEP/DCNR Environmental Education and Information Center at 400 Market St. in Harrisburg, Pa. This center is located in the Rachel Carson State Office Building, on Market Street across from the public train and bus terminal. Electronic access at DEPLearningCenter@state.pa.us.

GreenWorks Channel -- Visit the Internet site listed in the box below to access environmental information and to find out what you can do.

This fact sheet and related environmental information are available electronically via Internet. For more information, visit us through the PA PowerPort at <http://www.state.pa.us> or visit DEP directly at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (directLINK “Earth Day”).



www.GreenWorks.tv - A web space dedicated to helping you learn how to protect and improve the environment. The site features the largest collection of environmental videos available on the Internet and is produced by the nonprofit Environmental Fund for Pennsylvania, with financial support from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 877-PA-GREEN.