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Monarch Research
4970 Lakeside Road
Marion, IA 52302
Monarchresearch.org

Six Years After the Derecho, Local Employers Help Plant the Next Generation of Trees

CEDAR RAPIDS/MARION, Iowa - August 21, 2026 - Six years after the August 10, 2020, derecho reshaped our community, local employers and Monarch Research are once again turning recovery into action - one tree at a time.

Through Planting Forward, employees of participating organizations who live in Linn County can receive free native trees to plant at home. Each year, employers across the community join the effort, with many returning year after year. This year's participants include BAE Systems, Transamerica/Aegon, Mercy Medical Center and, new to the program, Collins Aerospace, along with numerous other local employers.

The goal for 2026: put another 30,000 native trees into the hands of Linn County homeowners.

Employees: Order Now

The 2026 Planting Forward program is open now through September 10. Employees of participating organizations are encouraged to place their orders now through their employer.

Employers interested in joining the 2027 Planting Forward program can learn more and connect with Monarch Research at monarchresearch.org.

"Six years ago, our community experienced an extraordinary loss," said Clark McLeod, founder of Monarch Research. "What has happened since then has shown us something equally extraordinary: when businesses, homeowners and community organizations come together around a common goal, we can accomplish far more than any one of us could do alone. Planting Forward has given us a glimpse of what is possible when that kind of collective action is sustained over time."

The derecho destroyed more than half of Cedar Rapids' tree canopy and resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of trees across Linn County. Planting Forward was created in response to that loss.

Since then, the program has grown into a community-wide restoration effort. More than 120,000 native trees have been planted, with businesses, schools, municipalities and other organizations helping put trees directly into the hands of homeowners.

The trees planted today will provide shade, help manage stormwater, improve air quality and create habitat for birds, pollinators and other wildlife for decades to come.

From Recovery to What's Possible

The anniversary of the derecho is a reminder of both how much has been accomplished, and how much remains to be done. Young trees planted after the storm are beginning to establish themselves throughout Cedar Rapids, Marion and surrounding communities, but rebuilding a mature tree canopy will take generations.

“Recovery isn't just about getting back to where we were,” McLeod said. “It's about thinking bigger about what we can create together and what we want our communities and natural landscape to look like for the next 50 or 100 years.”

Six years after the derecho, the lesson is bigger than trees.

What began as a response to one catastrophic storm has become a model for what is possible when employers, homeowners, nonprofits and community leaders work together around a shared goal.

This year, 30,000 more trees will become part of that effort, planted in yards and neighborhoods throughout Linn County.

And as those trees take root, so does a larger question: What could happen if we brought the same level of community commitment to restoring Iowa's natural landscape as a whole? Monarch Research believes the answer lies in building on what this community has already proven - when people, businesses and communities unite around a shared vision, meaningful change is possible - one that can grow far beyond a single yard, neighborhood or generation.

About Monarch Research

Monarch Research was founded on the belief that addressing global environmental challenges requires local action. Through education, community engagement, and habitat restoration, the organization supports pollinators, promotes biodiversity, and inspires

stewardship. Key initiatives include One Child, One Tree, Monarch Zones, Planting Forward, Woodlands Native Tree Marketplace, and the Mighty Acorn Society.

Learn more at www.monarchresearch.org

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Media Contact: Jesse Thoeming, Executive Director, jthoeming@monarchresearch.org

Website: www.monarchresearch.org