

IOWA WEATHER SUMMARY – MARCH 2012

General Summary. March 2012 temperatures averaged 51.1° or 15.2° above normal while precipitation averaged 1.96 inches or 0.19 inch below normal. This ranks as the warmest and 57th wettest March among 140 years of records.

Temperatures. March temperatures were phenomenal by any measure. The month averaged 2.4° warmer than the previous warmest March (1910) and 2.2° warmer than the typical April. The monthly average of 15.2° above the 1981-2010 normal is a record for any calendar month (+13.7° in December 1877 was the previous record but there are three other months with larger negative departures). Having such a large positive departure allowed a multitude of other maximum temperature records to be broken or approached for various time scales.

Time Period	Period ending Mar. 2012	Rank	Record Prior to 2011-12
Feb.-Mar.	40.0	1	39.8 in 1878
Jan.-Mar.	35.3	1	34.9 in 1878
Dec.-Mar.	33.7	2	35.3 in 1877-1878
Nov.-Mar.	34.8	2	34.9 in 1877-1878
Oct.-Mar.	37.9	1	37.3 in 1877-1878
Sep.-Mar.	41.1	2	41.3 in 1877-1878
Aug.-Mar.	45.0	2	45.1 in 1877-1878
Jul.-Mar.	48.7	1	48.3 in 1930-1931
Jun.-Mar.	50.8	1	50.8 in 1931-1932
May-Mar.	51.5	2	51.7 in 1934-1935

The early portion of March 2012 was fairly ‘typical’ and even saw three days averaging cooler than normal (3rd, 4th and 5th). Daytime highs were only in the 20’s in some areas on the 3rd and 4th while Estherville reported a morning low temperature of -1° on the 5th. However, the final 26 days of the month were all warmer than normal with every day from the 10th through the end of March averaging at least ten degrees above normal. The most exceptional days were the 17th, 18th and 19th which all averaged more than 30 degrees warmer than normal. The statewide average minimum temperatures were higher than the normal daily maximum temperatures every day from the 14th through the 22nd. Daily high temperatures reached into the 80’s somewhere in the state on 14 days during March, topping off at 90° at Sioux City and Little Sioux on the 31st. However, the 90° maximums were not a state record for March and were exceeded in 1907 (92° at Clarinda and Massena on the 25th), 1910 (92° at Clarinda on the 22nd), 1968 (91° at Sioux City on the 30th) and 1986 (92° at Glenwood on the 29th).

Heating Degree Days. Home heating requirements, as estimated by heating degree day totals, averaged only 47% of last March’s total and 49% of normal. Degree day totals so far this heating season (since July 1, 2011) are running 20% less than last season at this time and 17% less than normal.

Precipitation. Monthly precipitation totals varied from 0.63 inch at Hawarden to 5.44 inches at Bedford. Amounts were above normal over much of southwest Iowa and portions of central and northeast Iowa but were well below normal across the northwest and southeast corners of the state. Low soil moisture reserves continue to be a worry, especially over northwest and north central Iowa, owing primarily to the lingering impact of very dry weather last fall and late last summer. The bulk of the month's rain fell from events on the 11th-12th, 19th-23rd and 29th-30th. There were a pair of snow events early in the month with 2 to 4 inches falling over the east one-third of the state on the 2nd with a band of about 1 to 3 inches of snow falling diagonally from northwest, through central, to southeast Iowa on the 4th. Brighton reported the most snow during the month with 6.5 inches while much of southwest Iowa recorded no snow at all. The statewide average snowfall was 1.5 inches or 3.2 inches less than normal, ranking 17th lowest March total among 125 years of records.

Severe Weather. There were scattered reports of severe thunderstorms on the 19th, 29th, 30th and 31st but overall activity was fairly normal for this early point in the season and was much less than seen in March 2011.

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