



## Notes from River Farm

### Finding Solace in Gardening

by David J. Ellis

**M**Y ORIGINAL plan for this column was to write about the wonderful Christmas ornaments the Smithsonian Institution lends us each year to decorate our trees here at River Farm, but the events of the last several weeks made such an article seem rather frivolous. Not that frivolity is necessarily bad; we all need light-hearted distractions from the serious issues facing our nation and world.

River Farm is less than 10 miles from the Pentagon, so the events of September 11 hit very close to home for all of us. Although no one on the AHS staff was directly affected by the attacks, most of us are acquainted with others who weren't so lucky. One of the regular members of the AHS online Gardening Community listserv, a resident of Long Island, wrote of her harrowing escape from the collapse of the World Trade Center towers. Another listserv member described her evacuation from the U.S. Capitol when the Pentagon was struck.

Eighteen Society members list addresses in buildings that were badly damaged or destroyed at Ground Zero in New York City. We hope and trust they are all safe, and our membership department has been contacting these people to offer to extend their memberships until they are able to take advantage of them once again.

Many members have written or called to say they had found great comfort during these distressing times by working in their gardens. River Farm itself has provided a peaceful, contemplative setting for many people in need of solace, as have botanical gardens, arboretums, and parks around the nation. On September 12, particularly, more people visited the grounds here than would have on a normal fall weekday, many of them with children who played happily in our Children's Gardens. A recent ar-

ticle in the *Washington Post* noted that New York City's public gardens, including Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the New York Botanical Garden, were also heavily visited in the days and weeks following the attacks.



Happily oblivious to the tragic events occurring in the world, a child frolics in the Children's Gardens at River Farm. Gardens can also provide adults with a respite from grief and anxiety.

In October, a tree was planted at River Farm in memory of the victims of the September 11 attacks and their friends and family members. The tree, a northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), is located near our parking lot, where it will provide shade for future generations of visitors to AHS headquarters. The AHS horticulture staff

also held a tree-planting demonstration to show Washington, D.C., area residents proper techniques for planting their own trees. We encourage all of you to consider planting a tree in your gardens and to support tree planting programs and other memorial activities in your communities.

One worthy program that has come to our attention is Trees of Strength, which originated with Master Gardeners at the North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Master Gardeners and Cooperative Extension service horticulturists are helping to coordinate donations of trees to be planted around fire stations, police stations, and airports. A suggested list of trees for planting has been drawn up and participants in this program are being asked to register online so that the results of this effort

can be shared with the families of victims and military personnel. For more information on this program, write to Trees of Strength, NC State University, Box 7609, Raleigh, NC 27609-7609, or visit the Web site [www.treesofstrength.org](http://www.treesofstrength.org).

In decades to come, the millions of trees that are planted will serve not only as fitting memorials to the victims of this tragedy, but as a living legacy for future generations of Americans.

*David J. Ellis is editor of The American Gardener.*