

By Ginny Gregory

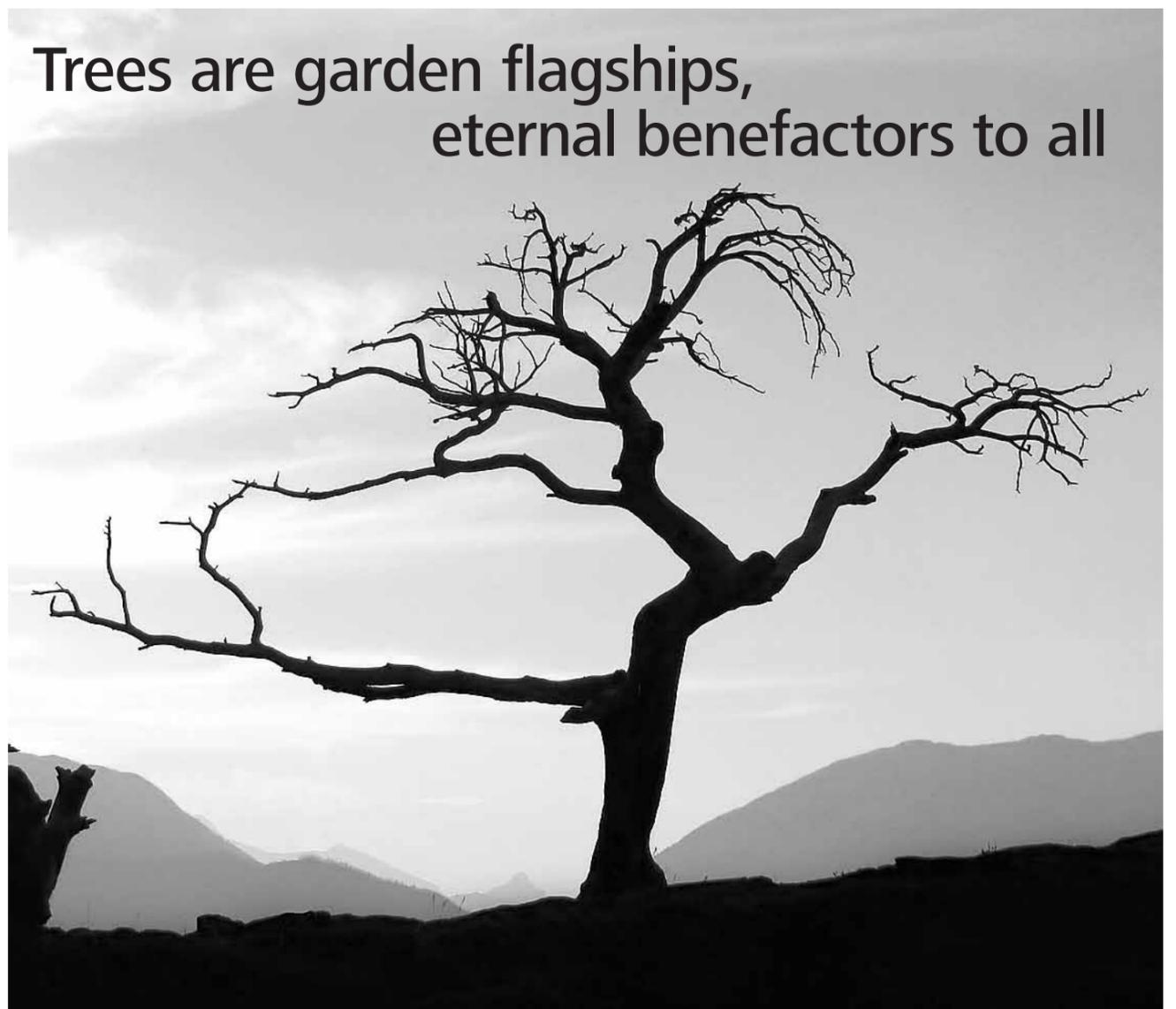
Time is beginning to slow down. Nature is pulling its' blanket close. I have begun to see the fallen leaves as that blanket.

It is a patchwork quilt to which each tree has made donations. Nature is quite the artist. It is during this special time of year that the real sculptural quality of the garden is displayed. Trees are the anchors of every garden.

My mother was an excellent steward to all of the trees in her garden. When the leaves were half way gone from the branches, she would stand and point with her cane while James, our gardener, would cut the branches that crossed or the ones that were small and muddled up the clarity of form. My mom had a sort of "off with their heads" attitude. She was never hesitant.

On the other hand, I ponder. I pull branches back to see how it might look once I have made the cut. I think about the surrounding plants. I decide who is the star and who is the understudy. My beautiful paper bark maple is really beginning to stretch out. That is the paper barks' natural inclination. I decided to do some structural pruning. You have to have ice water in your veins sometimes when making decisions in the garden. Unlike a bad haircut, it takes five to ten years to undo a mistake with trees. Trees ... they are so formidable and magical.

When I was young, I lived and dreamed in the magnolia trees that surrounded two of the sides of our property. Their arms stretch out with age and seem to invite a young soul to venture up the branches into the clouds. Richard Ward was my best friend when I was growing up in Rocky Mount. He taught me how to ride a bike so I could hang with him (training wheels were totally unacceptable). He



and I spent hours up in the trees playing Love Boat. Go figure. He always wanted to be the captain ... we often had words over who played what part.

There was one particular magnolia that was just perfect. We would sit up in the top of the tree, high on the fragrance of the magnolia blossom pretending to be up in the crows' nest. One day Richard announced that trees were cut up to make things like houses and furniture. I was horrified. I think Richard read all about this

in his World Book Encyclopedia. After that, I can remember looking at trees and wondering what would become of their lives. They were so human-like to me. I really struggled with the fact that they could be cut down to be used to make things that were not living. I would have been totally undone if I had thought of them being used as firewood. Now, it just seems like a natural life cycle.

As I grew older, I learned that a landscape architect from Richmond,

Va. had been hired to design our garden layout. He specified that magnolias be sited on the edge of the property. The trees were used to buffer the traffic noise from the road. Our house was on a main road out of town ... in a neighborhood, but nonetheless right on the road. He thought about using trees to help create a more tranquil setting for us. Furniture, houses, sound buffer.

As time went on, I built a house in the woods. It is a tree house set up high. I look at the treetops from my bedroom window. My Jackson dog shivers as he sees the squirrels jumping from branch to branch. We often watch the morning unfold together. Life is so very circular. Trees have always played such an important role in my life. They are the flagships in every garden. They have survived so much on this planet and only given back. I am snuggled in with the trees. Their leaves are my blanket. They remind me to slow down... that winter is on the way. It's time to reflect as we gaze on the mighty trees in our lives.

Ginny Gregory is the owner and creative energy behind "Beyond The Pail...Creating Gardens and Beyond" and "Beyond The Crate...Finding simplicity out of chaos," an organizing, de-cluttering, down-sizing business. For more information, please check www.beyondthepail.net.

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