

## ARBOR DAY

THIS YEAR, as it has for the past eight years, the Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens distributed five-gallon size trees to Los Angeles County schools to help the students celebrate Arbor Day, March 7. The tree of the year for 1980 was *Callistemon* 'Red Cascade,' a weeping bottlebrush that was first introduced to the nursery trade by the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum in 1976. Packets of educational material for use in Arbor Day programs accompanied the 966 trees that were given out the last week of February. Members of Las Voluntarias assembled the packets containing information on the history of Arbor Day, nature project ideas, energy conservation suggestions, a coloring sheet illustrating a food chain, and a crossword puzzle of tree names. Teachers were encouraged to adapt whatever parts of the packet fit their particular classroom situations.

Over the years many teachers have commented on the enthusiasm

shown by their students at the time of the tree planting ceremony, but none had offered subsequent information on any long-term benefits for the schools or students.

Then last spring an envelope arrived at the Department containing letters of thanks from students and a brief cover letter from Mrs. Martha Schneidewind, an English teacher at West Covina High School. She wrote that she had requested a tree each Arbor Day since 1972, the year after the Department began giving a single large tree to each school instead of many seedling trees to students. Seven of the trees, beginning with the *Liquidambar styraciflua* in 1972 and on through the *Cassia leptophylla* and the *Chorisia speciosa*, have been planted by her classes with full Arbor Day ceremonies. Her suggestion that we inspect the trees on the West Covina campus was quickly accepted. Five of the trees are flourishing, most notably the pioneering liquidambar which, despite early vandalism, is now 25 feet tall. The *Cassia leptophylla*,

planted for Arbor Day in 1975 when it had a thumb-sized trunk and eight leaves, now spreads a leafy canopy about 15' in diameter.

Although trees on school campuses face many hazards from casual twig pullers to careening lawnmowers, only two trees planted over the seven years succumbed.

If Mrs. Schneidewind's experience is typical, the gift trees have contributed beauty to many campuses in Los Angeles County. The next question is whether or not the students who participated in planting the trees gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of trees in a city. Here, too, the answer seems to be affirmative.

"Students who take part in the ceremony really develop a sincere interest in Arbor Day," Mrs. Schneidewind said. "They even come back years later to check on 'their' trees." This reassuring response indicates exactly the personal involvement with the urban forest that the Department's tree distribution program was designed to foster.



Students at West Covina High School check the health and size of the gold medallion tree (*Cassia leptophylla*) given to the school by the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum for Arbor Day 1975.

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