



PHOTO BY KEN MOORE
Sweet gum balls congregate as mulch beneath the big tree in Coker Arboretum.

FLORA
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Taking a lesson from nature, it seems so logical to let the gum balls lie where they fall, creating a natural mulch. Think about the natural forest. Each tree drops leaves that become natural mulch, which eventually decomposes to become nutrients for the roots. The wise and resourceful Botanical Garden staff at The Coker Arboretum leave gum balls to serve as mulch beneath that magnificent tree in the central lawn.

Heiney related to me that gum-ball mulch has been the remedy for her “dog-lying-in-the-flower-border” problem. When she began mulching her flower beds with sweetgum balls, the dog stopped lying amongst the flowers. Similarly, I learned from my mother-in-law, Jane King, who maintains plants in pots at Carol Woods, that gum-ball mulch in pots discourages digging and uprooting of pesky squirrels.

So rather than curse the fallen sweetgum balls, enjoy taking a closer look at the architecture and beauty

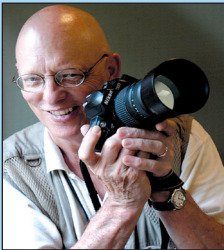
of each one and keep them on site to serve a useful purpose. In fact, consider the flowers and fruit that fall from all our trees as a resource to keep on site and to recycle back to the earth, as is nature’s way. Eliminate the energy wasted in collecting that fine natural “debris” and moving it curbside to create unnecessary work for town staff.

A good friend described the quiet sound of the raining down of sweetgum seed during a woods walk last fall. I’m going walking next fall in hope of capturing that experience myself.



Johnny gets his Eagle, 1963

My 15-year-old childhood chum, Johnny Allcott, backed by proud parents June and John Allcott Sr., poses for photos after receiving his Eagle rank at Troop 39’s court of honor at the Institute of Pharmacy building on Church Street, Chapel Hill. A budding photo-geek, I made this terrible snapshot with my Kodak Flashmate and included fellow scouts, left to right, John Radford (and his parents), Bob Cadmus and Timmy Keith-Lucas. Though I haven’t seen John Allcott in over 40 years, we still exchange Christmas cards faithfully every year. Married to the former Beth Hunt of Chapel Hill, he’s a doctor in Eugene, Ore., where they’ve lived for decades. And I bet that in some closet he’s still got his scout uniform with that coveted Eagle badge.



A THOUSAND WORDS
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