

GRIEF THERAPY: Personal remembrances

GARDEN MEMORIALS KEEP THOUGHTS OF LOVED ONES NEARBY

By JACK BULAVSKY
SPECIAL TO HOME



Surrounded by a dog, cat, bird, ferret, rabbit and turtle, this garden angel wears an iron halo and wings crafted with a touch of Old World elegance. The large Gentle Spirits garden statue is priced at \$349.95. Courtesy of the Comfort Co.

April 3, 2008--Remembering a deceased loved one is the highest honor one can bestow upon a family member, friend or loyal pet. There are many ways to do this, including planting a tree or commissioning a memorial plaque. Another option is a memorial garden. Designed primarily for backyards, the garden can be as simple as a single plant or tree, or as elaborate as several plants with a bench beside a reflecting pool.

"Garden memorials are gaining in popularity," said [Renee Wood](#), founder of The [Comfort Co.](#), an online boutique that specializes in sympathy, remembrance or memorial-type gifts (www.thecomfortcompany.net). "Remembering a loved one can now be as easy as walking outside."

According to Wood, garden memorials are a growing trend for two reasons: therapy and proximity.

"A garden, in and of itself, is a therapeutic way of dealing with grief," she explained. "People plant trees, nurture them and watch them grow. This helps in the loss process. The second reason for their popularity is that people want a place that is nearby to share a moment with the deceased. We're such a transient society today and no longer live in the same state where our loved ones are buried. It used to be that several generations of a family would be buried in the same cemetery and families could gather there on the anniversary of that person's death. Not anymore. Therefore, people are creating these gardens to have a place to sit and reflect."

Wood, a former neonatal intensive care unit social worker who assisted families in

dealing with loss, understands how difficult it can be to find a sympathy gift for someone who has lost a loved one.

"Words of sympathy do not come easily and sympathy gifts are difficult to find," she said. "It was under those circumstances, when I needed a gift, that I started the company. I sketched a teardrop-shaped pendant with a forget-me-not flower in the design, penned a verse to go along with it and had it manufactured. Now there are close to 400 items in our catalog, most of them garden memorials."

In public memorial gardens, the bereaved need to observe strict regulations enforced by the owner of the land. A private garden is more personal and largely free from such restrictions.

Wood has seen memorial gardens on apartment porches and believes it comes down to space and preference. Personalized remembrance stones can be customized to go with inspirational sayings already engraved on the stone.

"Our most popular stone reads, 'When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure,'" she said. "We have different messages and inscriptions that can be personalized by adding a plaque. We don't get a lot of returns because people know what they're doing when ordering the stones and those receiving them are appreciative."

The largest memorial gift is a tree. Next, is the one-piece garden stone that can be removed from its box and immediately placed outside. A memorial bench, consisting of a top and two legs, is sent with epoxy glue and instructions.

Wood said Christmas is her busiest time of year.

"Sending a memorial as a Christmas gift is a lovely gesture," she said. "We deliver years after a person's death because remembering someone doesn't always have to be at the time of death. The purpose is to let someone know you remember and care. Other busy times are Mother's Day, birthday of the deceased and anniversary of the death. Memorials sent to women on Mother's Day are for mothers who have lost a child or to children who have lost their mother."

Grief counselors and social workers at local hospitals agree it is important to acknowledge those who have lost someone.

"As a society, we are hesitant about approaching the subject of death, yet we know mourners want to discuss the loss," said a social worker at University Medical Center. "People feel pressure to say or do the right things to help take away a person's grief. That's not the objective. The objective is acknowledging that person's loss and letting them know you're thinking of them. Offer support. That is the most wonderful gift of all."