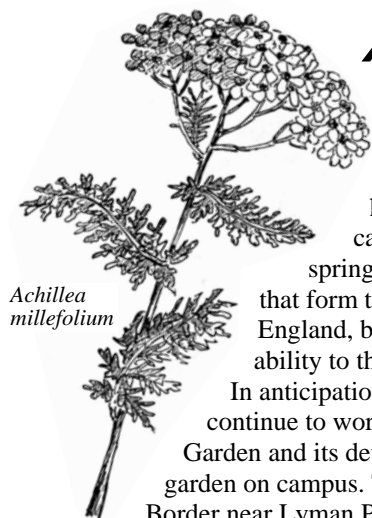


Capen Garden Renovation Continues

Tracey A.P. Culver



Achillea millefolium

As I write this, it's the beginning of February. Snowdrops are up, pussy willows are out, and the occasional spring birdsong can be heard. After an unusually warm January, native New Englanders wait for the inevitable payback. Who knows what horrors March will bring. One thing we gardeners can depend on, though, is the arrival of the new spring growth of the herbaceous perennial plants that form the backbone of the gardens of New England, beloved for their hardiness and their ability to thrive under the most adverse conditions.

In anticipation of the new growing season, we continue to work on plans for the renovation of Capen Garden and its development as the premier teaching garden on campus. The Ruth Brown Richardson Perennial Border near Lyman Plant House is chiefly ornamental, with perennials, annuals, and biennials growing happily all together. Although quite beautiful, this arrangement makes it difficult to label plants clearly. Visitors to the border are always pointing and asking, "What is that plant?" For Capen Garden, we envision a very organized border solely of perennials with clear labeling and informative signage.

To that end, our plan is to establish an A to Z perennial border at Capen. Each of forty-seven genera will have its own four foot by six foot bed in a border that will run alphabetically from *Achillea* to *Zizia*, covering 188 linear feet. Each of these beds will include several different species and/or cultivars of one genus, showing the diversity within each genus using garden-worthy representatives. Plans include a brochure, available to the public, which will list each genus, its cultural requirements and flowering and growth habits, as well as descriptions of each cultivar/species present, allowing the interested person to easily identify each plant.

In some cases, today's perennials bear little resemblance to their ancestors that were grown in the cottage gardens of England. Intensive selection and hybridization have served to greatly increase the range of forms and colors in many genera, resulting in a much larger palette for garden design. The A to Z border at Capen Garden presents unique challenges; indeed, the alphabetical arrangement dictates an order counterintuitive to many rules of perennial border design. Because this will be a teaching garden, emphasis will be on showing the diversity of forms available rather than arranging them in an aesthetically pleasing way. Some colors that may not be ideal together will by necessity be juxtaposed in neighboring beds. We will certainly try to create as complementary a mixture as possible, and, ideally, any inharmonious combinations will be somewhat offset by the large buffer of green lawn. This large lawn area is almost perfectly square, approximately sixty-five feet per side. To bring the perennial border into proportion to the space, the plantings will be backed by a yew hedge fronted by a two-foot maintenance strip. The hedge, strip, and planting beds will bring the border out about twelve feet into the large lawn area, creating a U shape facing the teaching pavilion based around the low stone sitting walls.

We intend to incorporate the forms of each perennial genus most commonly seen in gardens as well as the newer cultivars that represent the latest breeding efforts. For example, the bed for *Echinacea* will include the standard purple coneflower represented by the cultivar 'Rubinstern' as well as a white-flowered form, the new double 'Razzmatazz,' and more recent hybrids 'Sunrise' (yellow) and 'Sunset' (orange). The genus *Monarda* will be represented by the five-foot-

tall scarlet 'Jacob Cline' as well as the twelve-inch 'Petite Delight' along with several intermediate cultivars. The *Hemerocallis* bed will include the classic yellow daylily 'Hyperion' and some

cultivars that show the features most sought after in recent hybridizing efforts, i.e., contrasting eye zones, watermarks, picotee-edged petals, double flowers, and spider-flowered forms. As the perennials mature and increase in size, the horticulture class will learn how to divide them, and the divisions could then be part of a plant sale for the Smith College community.

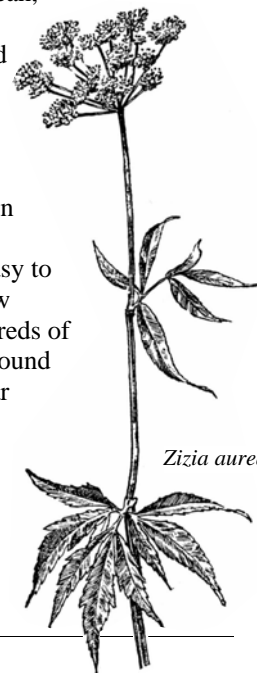
Establishment of the A to Z perennial border at Capen Garden is a first step in the development of the newly

renovated area as a teaching garden for annuals and perennials. Other planned displays include an A to Z annual border and a trial garden showing the best of breed in peonies, tree peonies, iris, and roses. Another bed illustrating the history of daylily breeding is also being considered. The black fence at the entrance to the garden is a perfect foil for the exhibition of a variety of annual vines including morning glory, scarlet runner bean, thunbergia, hyacinth bean, cypress vine, and moonflower. These will also be labeled clearly for teaching purposes.

Today the winter sun is quite warm for February, making it easy to envision the bright new spring growth of hundreds of perennials breaking ground at Capen Garden a year from now. Let March bring on its worst; gardeners live for April and the promise of new growth, new plants, and new challenges. ☘



Hemerocallis fulva



Zizia aurea