

Capen Garden

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Tucked away on the northeast edge of campus and hidden behind evergreen hedges is Capen Garden, one of the secret garden treasures at Smith. The garden hosts a spectacular display of over 2000 tulips, which will burst forth in pinks and reds this spring.

Bessie Capen, one of the first women to graduate from M.I.T., was hired in 1876 to teach botany as well as chemistry at Smith. She later founded the Capen School, adjacent to the Smith campus. The College acquired the Capen School in 1921, giving the Botanic Garden a new garden space, which was redesigned by Kate Ries Koch. In 1934 Dorcas Brigham and the horticulture class designed and planted an additional area of the garden. Today, Capen Garden is still used by horticulture students as an outdoor laboratory and work space, as well as by those in the know seeking a quiet place of refuge.

The garden is designed as a series of outdoor rooms each with its own character. At the western end you'll find Capen Shop, where much of our equipment is stored and where most of our outdoor gardeners are based. Our new production greenhouse is also located here (sorry, the greenhouse is not

open to the public, although those of you who attended our plant sale last September got a glimpse inside). From here one enters Capen Garden through a 65-foot rustic rose arbor lined with perennial beds. Adjoining the arbor is the Carol Brown Knot Garden (the former site of the Herb Garden), dedicated in 1989 to honor Carol Brown '11, in commemoration of her 100th birthday. Milly Ellis, who took horticulture with Gregory Armstrong in 1983, designed the original garden. Today the intricate pattern of the knot is created with dwarf boxwood and a dwarf barberry, *Berberis* 'Crimson Pygmy.' In the center of the knot stand four rosemary plants pruned as standards and overwintered in the greenhouses.

The rose arbor leads into the next garden space, which contains perennials arranged in borders and island beds and surrounded at the two entrances by *Kalmia latifolia*, mountain laurel.



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Following the center path leads one to the next room, a formal garden with a gazebo honoring Jill Ker Conway, the college's first woman president. The flowerbeds surrounding the gazebo are planted with spring bulbs and summer annuals. Each fall the horticulture class plants the tulip beds, which cover over 1000 square feet. The October 12, 2000 planting day proved to be sunny and warm (in contrast to past years when the class was seen working in raincoats) and, amazingly, the students planted 2200 bulbs in just about two hours. Any mistakes will go undetected until the tulips show their colors. Look for white 'Diana,' pink 'Christmas

Marvel,' and red 'Coeur Cardinal.' The tulip garden is a memorial planting established in 1997 as a tribute to Mary Mattison van Schaik '31, an ardent supporter of the Garden. She was a frequent visitor to the greenhouses and played a significant role in helping to beautify the Smith campus. In 1971 on the retirement of William Campbell, she wrote the text for a wonderful booklet, *The Gardens and Arboretum of Smith College* (now out of print).

Naturalistic plantings mark the last of the garden enclosures directly adjacent to Capen House. Here you will find spring drifts of scillas and Virginia bluebells flourishing in the shade of a large American beech, *Fagus grandifolia*, and handsome mature specimens of *Stewartia* and *Hamamelis*, witch hazel.

If you have somehow missed this lovely garden, be sure to take a stroll over there soon. Regardless of the season, there is always something to enjoy.

