

The Confusion of Nomenclature

All those names of people, places, and things that we have filed so carefully in the pigeonholes of our brains have a tendency to scramble themselves over time. None so spontaneously as plant names! Often we recall the botanical name and the common name eludes us or the other way around.

Looking for bishop's weed in the index the other day I found *Aegopodium*, *Ammi majus*, Bishop's cap (a cactus), *Astrophytum myriostigma*, *Mitella*, and Bishop's wort (*Stachys officinalis*). What I have known as Bishop's weed is indeed *Aegopodium* or goutweed. Once planted, these busy rhizomes ensure you will have it forever. The variegated one is an especially fine brightening ground cover for a shady place in poor soil where little else will grow.

It blooms in early summer, small umbels of white flowers on leafless stems. If your soil is fertile you may wish to deadhead it before it sets seed. In fine loam it is invasive.

Ammi majus, also called bishop's weed, is a taller plant, annual or biennial with fernlike foliage and creamy white, lacey flowers in rounded umbels. It looks a lot like Queen Anne's lace. To add to our confusion, Queen Anne's lace is the name for two different plants: it is both *Anthiscus sylvestris* (Cow parsley) and *Daucus carota* (wild carrot). The unplanted volunteer along rural roads is probably wild carrot, native to here. Another *Anthiscus* is *A. cerefolium*, common chervil with anise-scented leaves, useful in the kitchen garden. A named cultivar of *A. sylvestris* is 'Ravenswing' with purple/brown leaves and umbels of tiny white flowers with small pink bracts. It provides a great contrast to other perennials and it blooms a long time, from spring through summer.

Another plant that resembles Queen Anne's lace is *Angelica*, a genus of 50 species of perennials and biennials native to damp woodlands in the northern hemisphere. I bought *A. gigas* years ago without knowing it was 'short-lived'. It was disappointing to lose those strong purple stems with large plumb buds bursting into dark red heads. There is also a lime green *Angelica*, *A. archangelica*, that grows to six feet.

Mitella, called bishop's cap or miterwort is a short native plant with heartshaped leaves and racemes of tiny bell flowers. It is a good groundcover for light shade.

Bishop's wort, *Stachys officinalis*, syn. *Betonica officinalis*, *S. betonica* (wood betony) is a perennial with rosettes of wrinkled dark green leaves and upright stems bearing spikes of pink, white, or reddish purple flowers. We usually associate the *Stachys* genus with the species called lambs' ears for their soft wooly grey leaves.

None of these plants with weed in their common name will have societies dedicated to their preservation but they are wonderful for gardeners who want something green and growing to attract bees and butterflies. Best of all, they require minimum care in these dog days of August.

CABBAGES & KINGS

We need to save more than whales and polar bears. Most of us do not regard the lowly bug as an endangered species but actually these lowly creatures are essential to a workable environment. Beetles for example are sanitation workers, keeping the natural world clean and healthy. By some process they clean up and deposit the trash where it eventually becomes something positive. This is analogous to the performance of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. Living near the Bay we are familiar with the services done by the succulent oyster. An oyster is capable of filtering 60 gallons of water a day and once upon a time there were enough oysters to filter 19 trillion gallons – the whole Bay!

This filtering results in pollutants being bundled up and disposed of harmlessly. Amazing!