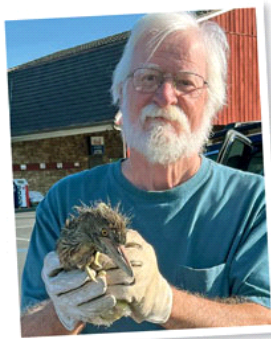


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Epilogues & Emergences

John Friel



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Local Scene Revisited: Last month This Space took you through the flower trials at Penn State's research center near Landisville, Pennsylvania. Post-publication I learned that the Master Gardeners who maintain similar trials at another PSU site, in Centre County, have selected three perennial plants of the year, based on their observations.

It was gratifying and confirming to see that their choices had previously won the Perennial Plant Association's Perennial Plant of the Year award: *Phlox paniculata* Jeanna (2024), *Rudbeckia American Gold Rush* (2023) and *Aralia cordata* Sun King (2020).

Centre County is farther west and north, 600 ft. higher in elevation, and colder (Zone 6b) than here in Lancaster County (7a). I love it that latitude and altitude are anagrams of one another; where plant hardiness is concerned, they have similar effects.

Farther afield: On a day off from singeing our fair Irish complexion on the beaches of our second-smallest state, This Space spent an afternoon strolling the grounds of a relatively new public hort showpiece: Delaware Botanic Gardens at Pepper Creek, near Dagsboro.

With five major gardens across 37 acres, DBG certainly qualifies for the "small gem" category of public gardens. Its story is on the improbable side. As Amy Brecount White wrote in *Flower Magazine*, the garden "sprouted without inherited acreage or a wealthy donor." Just a newly-formed nonprofit's dream on paper in 2012, it opened its gates in 2019.

In between, the founders pulled off a major coup: They persuaded Piet Oudolf to create a meadow for them. Yes, THAT Piet Oudolf, the Dutch superstar who designed New York's Highline and Battery Gardens and Chicago's Lurie Garden. A recent installation is maturing around a new Philadelphia museum dedicated to the work of sculptor Alexander Calder. Fun fact: Calder's grandfather sculpted the statue of William Penn atop Philly's City Hall.

Landing an Oudolf garden entitles DBG to serious bragging rights. It's not something you'd expect in a grass-roots, community-supported garden that relies on lots of volunteers to keep it looking spiffy. If the name is unfamiliar, a marvelous documentary video, "Five Seasons: The Gardens of Piet Oudolf," offers an immersive introduction to a

unique perspective not just on gardens, but on the very nature of beauty itself. Do look it up. You won't be disappointed.

The meadow, a multifaceted group of large, lush plantings, is definitely the highlight in this setting. Like Oudolf's other sites, it changes seasonally, but always offers something extraordinary to look at. Under Oudolf's guidance, volunteers and staff planted 70,000 perennials, annuals and grasses, with thousands of bulbs to kick things off in spring.

The avifauna fan in me delighted in this datum: 85 species of birds call DBG home. And as a beer lover, I loved it that Dogfish Head, a locally based, nationally distributed brewer/distiller, stepped up to sponsor the Learning Garden.

In August, the amsonia (blue star) was barely beginning to transition from summer's soft green to its autumn trademark, a glorious sea of gold/orange foliage in constant motion. A visit now, as fall deepens, will yield a very different series of epiphanies as you traipse the sinuous, but symmetrical, paths.

But there's plenty more to see here. Walking trails wind through varied plantings, in sun and shade, past a folly garden and widely scattered whimsical sculptures: A troll, an octopus, a sea serpent and so on, all made of natural materials, like driftwood and vines, from the grounds. The most elaborate and intricate is a tall carved wizard whose staff is topped with a gleaming quartz crystal. Selfie opportunities abound.

Near the entrance is the Rhyne Garden, an acre and a half of bioswale—a decidedly unlovely word that doesn't do this thickly-planted, carefully engineered linear garden justice. It incorporates 12,000 native perennials, 300 native shrubs and dozens of strategically placed red maples. But for all its colorful beauty it's a functional garden, capturing and filtering runoff from the parking area before sending it on to Pepper Creek—one of Delaware's many tidal streams, feeding into Indian River Bay and eventually Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

Will it make rural Dagsboro a multi-state destination? The locals probably hope not. But a stroll among the flowers proved a fine break from those crowded, skin-searing beaches. **GP**

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