

# LOOK AGAIN !

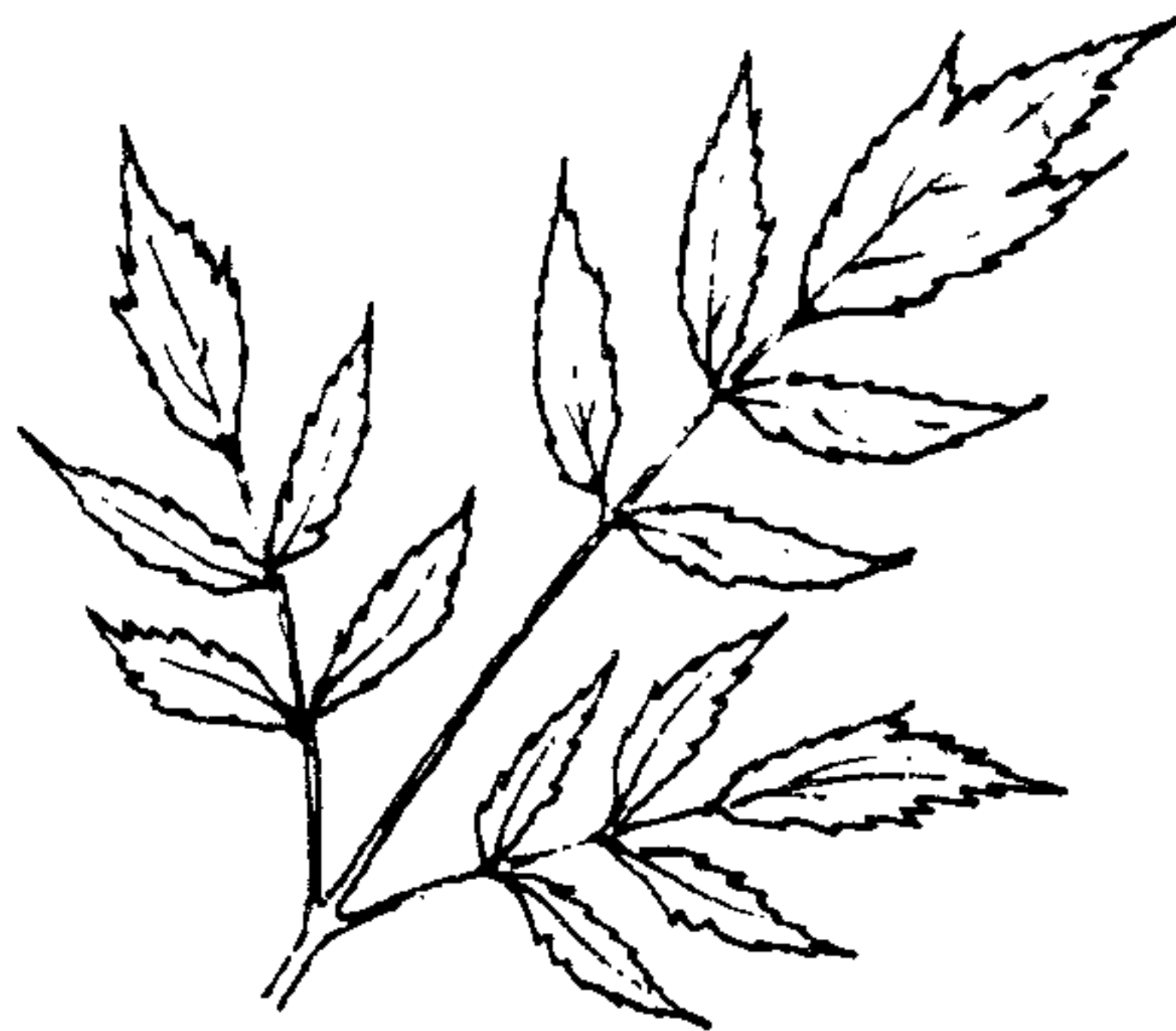
Occasionally when keying out two plants that look almost identical we are surprised to discover that they are not close relatives within a single genus but actually belong to different families. This is the case with Aruncus dioicus, a member of the Rose Family and one of several plants known as Goat's-beard, and Astilbe biternata of the Saxifrage Family, which because of the resemblance is called False Goat's-beard.

Both species have serrate, bi-ternately compound leaves and large panicles of tiny white flowers. Even at some distance, however, one clear difference can usually be discerned: the terminal leaflet on Astilbe is three-lobed whereas on Aruncus they are uniformly simple. Closer at hand, Astilbe can be seen, and felt, to have glandular hairs on the upper stem and in the inflorescence, as contrasted with the glabrous Aruncus.



ARUNCUS DIOICUS

These are short-cuts, of course, the classification of flowering plants being based for the most part not on such characters as leaf shape and pubescence but on similarities in floral structure which seem to imply ancestral kinship. This will be evident if we trace these two by means of a key, for it will tell us that, among other criteria, Astilbe flowers have ten stamens while the staminate flowers of Aruncus (it is dioecious) have at least fifteen and frequently more.



ASTILBE BITERNATA

*Dick Smith*