

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Mid to Late August 2022

Panicle Hydrangeas – Kaufman Hydrangea Garden, Flowering Arboretum, Garden-wide

Although the more familiar bigleaf hydrangeas tend to hold their bloom color well into summer, often ageing gracefully, they are now past their bright peak. However, the panicle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) come into their own in early July lasting until early fall. These differ not only in bloom time, but unlike many other hydrangeas, they do well in full sun. The flowers usually emerge a fresh greenish white, mature to pure white, then age to a dusky pink later in the summer.

Crapemyrtles – Garden-wide

Norfolk Botanical Garden has the only recognized collection of crapemyrtles (*Lagerstroemia* species and hybrids) in North America, and likely the world. Our climate is extremely well adapted to their growth, closely mimicking the climate of their native Asia. They have been an important part of our collection since Fred Huette first encouraged area gardeners to plant them last century. Today they are the official tree of the city of Norfolk, and comprise over half of all street trees on city property. Their peak season of bloom is typically early July, but regular summer rains produce flushes of fresh blooms.

Desert Willow – Conifer Garden

Willow in name only, this plant (*Chilopsis linearis*) is actually related to catalpa trees. It is native to the desert southwest where it likes to live in washes where water might be more prevalent. It does well here in Coastal Virginia in full sun, but must have very well drained soil. The specimen in our Conifer Garden, near NATO Bridge is the largest in the state.

Rose Glory Bower – Colonial Garden

This exotic plant (*Clerodendrum bungei*), with its beautiful rose-colored flowers, is often listed as a suckering shrub, but we treat it as a perennial cutting it back in the winter dormant season. Here at NBG it occupies a triangular planting bed hemmed in on all sides by asphalt just outside of our Colonial Garden. There is a good reason it is contained in such a way, given a less confined space, this rowdy beauty might take over the entire Garden!

Sacred Lotus – Japanese Garden

There are few flowers more attractive and eye-catching than that of sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*). The fragrant blossoms are shades of a delicate pink, surrounding a central pod. This edible and medicinal wetland plant is revered in Asian cultures for its ability to cleanly rise above the muck and mud with such beauty. After the blooms have gone, the attractive seed pods will remain and are prized by flower arrangers. You can enjoy these flowers up close and personal from the stone footbridge in our Japanese Garden.

Star Landing Lantana – Butterfly Garden

Most lantana varieties (*Lantana camara*) are considered annuals in Coastal Virginia. However, there are a handful that are reliably hardy perennials for us, with the best-known being 'Miss Huff' which is

a favorite here at NBG. Over the past few years we have also grown very fond of a variety called 'Star Landing', which is a little less rangy than 'Miss Huff', and the gardeners and volunteers in our Butterfly Garden have been impressed with how many pollinators it attracts. The color of 'Star Landing' is also different being a very strong orange and yellow with no pink.

Joe-Pye Weed – Pollinator Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, Border Garden, and Elsewhere

These tall robust plants (*Eutrochium* species) are a spectacular summer blooming native perennial. Their large mauve flowerheads are very attractive to butterflies, and later on seed-eating birds will relish the ripe seeds. The plants namesake was purported to be a native American herbal healer who used a variety of plants to treat illness, including Joe-Pye weed.

Sunflowers – WOW Grain Plain

While there are many species of perennial sunflower, the most commonly familiar is an annual, *Helianthus annuus*. Though it has been bred for showy flowers, it has more importantly been bred to for its seeds, which are an important food, fodder, and oil crop. We planted sunflowers in many places this year to remember the people of Ukraine, and to help promote our Sunflower Music Festival occurring later this month on the 28th.

Formosa Lily – Sensory Garden

This lily (*Lilium formosanum*) is native to the island of Taiwan, and both its common and botanical name reference Formosa, a former name for the island. Late summer flowers rise atop tall stalks and are reminiscent of Easter lilies. Later on, the dried pods can add handsome texture to the winter garden. If happy, they will seed around prolifically.

Black-eyed Susans – Garden-wide

One of the most prolific genres of North American native plants is Rudbeckia, commonly referred to as black or brown-eyed Susan, or coneflower. There are many different species that do well in our climate and summer is their season to shine. Their flowers attract insect pollinators, and their ripe seeds offer many birds sustenance.

Jeana Phlox – Pollinator Demonstration Garden

It can be difficult to find plants that excel at both garden performance and at providing ecological benefits, but Jeana phlox (*Phlox paniculata* 'Jeana') does so. Gardeners love it for its tall clusters of pink flowers that bloom from July to September on a nearly mildew proof plant. Hosts of butterflies and other pollinators flock to its flowers as well.

Agastache 'Blue Fortune' – Canal Walk

This perennial is a hybrid between a Korean species and a North American species, and it has a lot going for it. The blue-green foliage has a fresh minty aroma; it does well in sunny drier locations; deer and rabbits generally leave it alone; its pale lavender blue flowers bloom from late June to September; and most importantly, it is a pollinator magnate, surpassed by few others.

Gordonia/Loblolly Bay – Flowering Arboretum

One of the Southeast's most underappreciated trees, Gordonia (*Gordonia lasianthus*) looks like a camellia on steroids when it is in bloom. In fact, it is a member of the same family as the more familiar camellia. In summer, beautiful white flowers cover the tree. Gordonia's are largely evergreen, but sometimes a few leaves will turn a glossy red. They prefer full sun in consistently moist soil. Our Flowering Arboretum is home to the state champion.

Bonsai Collection – Transition Garden

NBG is somewhat unique that our collection is managed by a group of dedicated and passionate bonsai volunteers. Over the past few years they have been able to substantially grow our collection and it now includes some amazing pieces, many of which were created from ordinary garden plants growing in our gardens or nursery.

Wildlife Watch – Ospreys are often very busy on Lake Whitehurst at this time of year looking for their next meal. When you hear their distinct call, look up. Maybe you can spy one with a fresh fish in its clutches flying overhead.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture