

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – December 2022

'Christmas Holiday' Heliconia – Tropical Display House

This tropical plant (*Heliconia vaginalis* 'Christmas Holiday') couldn't have a more apt name. It blooms in December and its inflorescences are pure red with white, sitting atop dark green foliage.

'Yuletide' and 'Winter's Snowman' Fall-blooming Camellias – Hofheimer Camellia Garden

Just as many other plants are turning brown and going dormant, fall blooming camellias (*Camellia sasanqua* and hybrids) color the landscape with pinks, reds, and whites. While the flowers are smaller than the more familiar Japanese camellias, there are more blooms per plant on sasanquas, plus they are delightfully fragrant.

'Joseph Lemper' Christmas Rose – The Glade

Not really a rose, but a very early blooming hellebore (*Helleborus niger* 'Joseph Lemper' HGC®). Pure white flowers open in December on nearly evergreen foliage. Hellebores as a group prefer shade, and once they are established, they can be very drought tolerant. Later on, look for many more hellebore varieties to brighten the winter landscape with their blooms.

'Jack Frost' Ligustrum – WOW

Also referred to as privet, this variety of ligustrum (*Ligustrum japonicum* 'Jack Frost') has evergreen, waxy foliage that is variegated ivory white and green. While many of its relatives have a reputation for being either weedy or invasive, earning them a spot on the naughty list, Jack seems to be behaving himself, but someone still has an eye on him.

'Christmas Tree' Liriope – The Conifer Garden

Many horticulturists turn up their noses at liriope (*Liriope muscari*), thinking it overused, but some things are overused for a reason. Most liriope can take sun or shade, they are evergreen, drought tolerant, and they have attractive purple flowers in late summer. 'Christmas Tree' has the same blooms, but held in clusters that are shaped like little purple Christmas trees.

'Elfin King' Strawberry Bush – Airport Berm

This is one of the compact strawberry bushes (*Arbutus unedo* 'Elfin King'). Unlike most plants, they flower at the same time as fruit ripens from last year's flowers. There are few plants that flower and fruit at the same time. The white blooms are bell shaped and resemble those of blueberries. The red fruits are textured like strawberries, and though they are edible, they are more often used to make liqueur than for eating fresh.

Winterberry Holly – Holly Garden, Discovery Grove

Many hollies are known for their evergreen prickly foliage, but not our native winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). In the fall the foliage turns a golden yellow before falling, though the branches are not

bare. They are covered in clusters of bright red, showy fruit which usually persists until January when overwintering birds will make a meal of them.

'North Pole' Arborvitae – Conifer Garden

This relatively new arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Art Boe' NORTH POLE®) is noted for its tall skinny stature, maturing at 15' tall by 5' wide. The evergreen foliage looks fresh all year, and rarely gets winter burn.

Christmas Fern – The Fern Glade

This native fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) is evergreen and can tolerate full to partial shade. It is also very tolerant of both wet and dry soil once established. Rabbits and deer avoid it.

'Winter Sun' Mahonia – Administration Welcome Garden

Like most mahonia, this selection (*Mahonia × media* 'Winter Sun') blooms in late fall to early winter, is very shade tolerant, and has evergreen holly-like foliage. Just in time for the winter solstice (a.k.a. Yule), the flowers are attractive to pollinators, and the purple-black fruit that follows will be relished by birds.

'Merry Christmas' American Holly – The Holly Garden

This female selection is a cultivar of our native American holly (*Ilex opaca*). Like the wild species, it can take a wide range of light conditions, and at this time of year it is covered with bright red berries.

Mistletoe – Wildflower Meadow

This plant (*Phoradendron leucarpum*) is an evergreen parasite that grows on and from other plants. The ancient druids thought this made it magical, and brought it into their houses to ward off evil spirits, where it morphed into our tradition of kissing underneath it. Even though it has romantic connotations, beware, its little white fruits are poisonous proving that love can sometimes be a little dangerous.

Wildlife Watch – On cold mornings, gizzard shad cluster together in the shallower waters of Lake Whitehurst, making it easy for a host of herons, egrets, and cormorants to enjoy a breakfast buffet.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture