Horticultural Highlights – Late March 2022

Camellias – Hofheimer Camellia Garden
These old Southern favorites are actually native to China, Japan, and Korea. Camellias (Camellia japonica and hybrids) are prized for their large showy, winter and spring-blooming flowers. Although they are planted throughout NBG, the best place to see them is in the Hofheimer Camellia Garden. NBG has an internationally recognized camellia collection with over 1000 different varieties and nearly 2000 individual plants.

Daffodils – Garden-wide
March is the peak month for daffodils (Narcissus species and hybrids), but with the right selection you can have them blooming from January through April. Right now most of the early and mid-season varieties are through, but there are quite of few later bloomers still flowering. We celebrate Daffodil Daze every March with a series of Garden Walk and Talks, and daffodil themed classes.

Laurustinus – Border Garden
Covered in masses of white flowers, laurustinus (Viburnum tinus 'Compactum') was more recently covered in clusters of pale pink buds. Spring happens fast! This evergreen is one of many notable members of the large Viburnum family, and it makes a great alternative to some of the more overused foundation shrubs commonly planted.

Crabapples – Flowering Arboretum, and other places
One of spring’s showiest flowering trees (Malus species), crabapples also do double duty in late summer by providing colorful fruit. They are indeed closely related to the apples we eat, but their fruit is smaller.

Magnolias – The Flowering Arboretum, Garden-wide
Most of the magnolias blooming in the Garden now are either saucer magnolias (Magnolia x soulangeana), star magnolias (M. stellata), or other species and hybrids. They always roll the dice blooming so early, as their flowers can be made ugly by hard freezes. Unfortunately many of those we have in the garden lost their bet this year when we had mid-20’s temperatures in early March. However, there are number that always bloom later, and these still look spectacular, but don’t wait as they will not last long either.

Spiketail – Matson Garden, Winter Garden
Rather uncommon in area landscapes, this spectacular plant (Stachyurus praecox) deserves more attention. Strands of yellow flowers form a cheerful fringe draped from bare branches, reminiscent of gold tinsel. The finest specimen of this plant grows in our Matson Garden.

Yoshino Cherries – Canal Walk, Arboretum, Garden-Wide
This variety (*Prunus x yedoensis*) is the classic cherry blossom tree that many are familiar with. It is also the variety that are planted around the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. Their beauty is fleeting so don’t miss out? Keep an eye out for the larger, pinker blooms of the Kwanzan cherry, the last cherry of the season.

The first azaleas of the season! – The Infinity Garden

*Rhododendron simsii 'Vittatum'* is an old favorite here at NBG, and it is one of the first to bloom every year in late winter. Head to the Infinity Garden and turn right at the gazebo. A walk on that path will bring you up close to their blooms of fuchsia and white. The other azaleas have started to peak open, and should be in full flower by mid-April.
Chinese Snowball Viburnum – The Border Garden
The large pale lime blossoms of this plant (*Viburnum macrocephalum*) will make some think a hydrangea on steroids has bloomed way too early. Their blossoms are so similar, but this old-fashioned favorite is always an early spring bloomer. We have two in The Border Garden that are quite large and always draw attention. They are heavily budded and just a week or two away from full bloom.

Redbud – Garden-Wide
Most of the redbuds in the Garden are varieties of our native eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), whose beauty often goes underappreciated with all of the other spring blooms. Many of the newer cultivars not only have beautiful flowers, but also have colorful foliage to add interest well beyond spring. NBG also has several varieties of Asian redbuds, mostly in the Flowering Arboretum.

Carolina Jessamine – Butterfly Restrooms, WOW
Although the sight of its intensely colored, canary yellow flowers are hard to miss, you will likely smell this delightfully fragrant native vine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) before you see it – it is so sweet. This vine is evergreen and makes for quick cover. It is also the state flower of South Carolina.

Golden Ragwort – Holly Garden
This wonderful native perennial (*Packera aurea*) is a great solution for gardeners with troubling spots. It will grow in sun or shade, deer and rabbits leave it alone, it is great for beneficial pollinators, and it forms a groundcover so thick that weeds will not come up through it. If that’s not enough, its bright yellow daisy-like flowers are quite beautiful. A limited quantity will be available this year at the annual NBG plant sale, April 22-24th.

Flowering Dogwood – Garden-wide
Other states get both a state tree and a state flower. Shortchanged Virginians have to be satisfied that our state tree and state flower are one in the same. To make matters worse it is the state flower for North Carolina and the state tree of Missouri, and flowering dogwood’s botanical name (*Cornus florida*) calls to mind the Sunshine State. These have just started to open in parts of the Garden and should be at peak bloom in just a few weeks.

Wildlife Watch – The bluebirds are busy right now fussing over their nesting boxes in anticipation of this year’s crop of chicks.

*Les Parks, Director of Horticulture*