

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – November 2022

Sasanqua 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. The early varieties begin blooming in the first few weeks of October, but their peak is typically mid-November, and there are a few selections that will bloom well into December.

Fall Foliage – Garden Wide

Peak fall color for us usually occurs somewhere between early and mid-November. Some of the best places to enjoy it are Mirror Lake, The Enchanted Forest, The Glade, Shady Woods, and along the road between the Hofheimer Camellia Garden and the Rhododendron Garden.

Japanese Maples – Garden-wide

One of the most spectacular plants at this time of year are the Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*). Their fall foliage colors are stunning. While we have them planted in many spots, some of the best places to see them are the Japanese Garden, The Glade, and The Rhododendron Garden.

Oakleaf Hydrangea – Colonial Garden

Most hydrangeas are known for their wonderful flowers, and the oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) is no exception. However, it is the only hydrangea to have attractive fall foliage in shades of red and burgundy tinged with orange. Also unusual for a hydrangea, this species has attractive exfoliating bark that keeps the plant interesting through the winter months.

Butterfly Maze – Butterfly Garden

Our butterfly maze is unusual in that its walls are not made from corn, boxwood, or some other plant typically seen in mazes. It is made from 'Northwind' switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*). This particular variety of native grass was chosen for its very upright habit, its blue-green color, and ease of growth. Right now, it has reached its full height and is in full flower, and the foliage has changed to a handsome tawny brown.

Loofah Sponge – Kitchen Garden

Covered with bright yellow flowers and large cucumber-like fruit, this annual vine (*Luffa aegyptiaca*) is currently living its best life, seemingly oblivious to the coming winter cold which will kill it. Making hay while the sun shines! The cucumber resemblance is no coincidence, they are both in the same family along with squash and pumpkins.

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.

Rugosa Rose – Butterfly Garden

This rose (*Rosa rugosa*) is one of the easiest to grow, perhaps a little too easy in some climates. Fortunately, it behaves here in Coastal Virginia. Right now, it is covered in beautiful red hips, extending the season of interest beyond the blooms. The fall foliage is late in dropping and is a rich golden yellow complimenting the hips nicely. Health tip – rose hips are extremely nutritious and are an especially rich source for vitamin C.

Encore Azaleas – NATO Triangle and Garden-wide

We all recognize azaleas as one of the icons of the spring garden, but Encore azaleas have been bred to bloom in the fall and summer as well. Other than bloom time, they are the same as most other azaleas.

'White Cloud' Muhly – NATO Tower, Conifer Garden

Although the native pink muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) has just about finished for the season, the cultivar 'White Cloud' is at peak bloom right now. It is a little taller than the pink, a bit sturdier, and the flowers last longer.

'Victory' Pyracantha – Border Garden

Dripping with red-orange fruit, the ungainly pyracantha (*Pyracantha koidzumii* 'Victory') can't decide if it wants to be a shrub or a vine. The birds don't care, they just bid their time waiting for the fruit to ever so slightly ferment. Once it crosses that threshold, then an avian feast begins. Not only do they relish the fruit, but pyracantha makes for good shelter being evergreen and thorny, protecting them from both cold weather and predators.

Pineapple Sage – Hummingbird, Baker Perennial Garden

Late in the season pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*) begins blooming with bright red, tubular blooms. Making that color even more striking is the selection 'Golden Delicious' whose chartreuse yellow foliage really sets off the blooms. The common name comes from the flavor of the leaves, which are indeed edible, though we recommend getting your pineapple from the grocery store.

Korean Sweetheart Tree – Sensory Garden

Although the flowers are insignificant on the Korean sweetheart tree (*Euscaphis japonica*), at least to our eyes, the fall fruit is quite showy with its red, heart-shaped capsules that split open revealing blue-black fruit. In order to have those pretty fruits, you need to have 2 sweetheart trees planted near each other, otherwise one tree by itself will be a lonely heart tree.

'Woodland Ruby' Anise Shrub – Sensory Garden

Like little pinky red starfish, the flowers of the anise shrub (*Illicium* x 'Woodland Ruby') bloom off and on from late spring into fall. It is a great choice for a flowering broadleaf evergreen that does well in shade, where it grows virtually trouble free. The common name comes from the anise scented foliage, especially noticeable when the foliage is crushed or bruised.

Wildlife Watch – If you see a rotund furry rodent, about the size of fat cat, near our greenhouse, that would be a groundhog. They are not a gardener's favorite friend, so please kindly ask it to move on and stay away from our plants.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture