

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – October 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.

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.

Blue Mist Flower – Flowering Arboretum, Border Garden, Garden-wide

This perennial (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), also known as hardy ageratum, is one of Coastal Virginia's most prolific wildflowers. Purple-blue flowers open in August and will bloom until mid-fall attracting butterflies, bees, and other pollinators.

Muhly Grass – Baker Perennial Garden, Conifer Garden

This native grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is pretty humble and unassuming much of the year. However, in early fall it becomes one of the most dramatic grasses with its rich misty pink plumes. If pink is not your color, the variety 'White Cloud' is just a dramatic blooming in our Conifer Garden.

Mexican Bush Sage – Sensory Garden, Kitchen Garden

One of the benefits of living in gardening zone 8 is that Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*) is hardy here, and not an annual like it is further north. It usually starts blooming in September with velvety purple and white flowers accented by its silvery foliage. It does best in full sun, and it must have good drainage, especially in winter. Though it will take the occasional drought, it does best with even moisture.

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* 'Northwind'). 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.

American Beautyberry – Pollinator Demonstration Garden, Va. Native Plant Garden

Clusters of colorful fruit adorn the branches of this native shrub (*Callicarpa americana*) every year in early fall, and they are the perfect shade of crayon-box-purple. Not only are they attractive to humans,

but several bird species enjoy the ripe fruit. As an added bonus, the foliage has mosquito repelling properties

Tea Olive – Matson Garden, Renaissance Court

One of the most fragrant group of plants anywhere is tea olive, or *Osmanthus*. There are several species, all of them evergreen, and they typically have clusters of small white, fall-blooming flowers with an intensely sweet fragrance. In the Matson Garden you can find an unusual orange flowering variety.

Hearts-a-burstin' – Pollinator Demonstration Garden

Also known as strawberry plant, this native shrub (*Euonymus americanus*) is covered with unusual fruit right now. Dark pink, textured seed capsules burst open to reveal bright orange seeds, hence the common names.

Lion's Tale – Fragrance Garden

Even though this unusual plant (*Leonotis leonurus*) hails from South Africa and is happier in that climate, it can be hardy in Coastal Virginia if it is sited where it gets some winter protection in extremely well drained soil. In mid-fall it is covered with bizarre, but very attractive, bright orange flowers.

Flowering Dogwood – Garden-wide

Among many other admirable attributes, this tree (*Cornus florida*) is the very first tree to take on fall foliage color. Weeks before other trees even consider changing, flowering dogwood starts to turn shades of red and burgundy. It is a marker of things to come.

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.

'Flying Dragon' Trifoliolate Orange – Sensory Garden

Also known as hardy orange, this large shrub or small tree (*Citrus trifoliata*) is indeed one of the most cold hardy of citruses, capable of withstanding winters much further north. The orange fruit is about the size of a ping pong ball, it is full of seeds, and is incredibly bitter and sour. Although they are technically edible, you would be better off eating an orange from the grocery store. 'Flying Dragon' is a variety noted for its contorted and twisted stems, and its talon-like thorns.

Wildlife Watch – NBG is fortunate to be the home of several pileated woodpeckers. These large, crow-sized birds have a distinctive screech and are often seen as a flash of red, black, and white flitting between trees in search of insects.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture