

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Late August to Early September 2022

Crapemyrtles – Garden-wide

Norfolk Botanical Garden has the only professionally 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 Huetten 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.

Zinnias – Wildflower Meadow

The cheery colorful flowers are summer annuals here. They come in just about every color imaginable; they are good for attracting butterflies and other insect pollinators; and they make great cut flowers. Our Wildflower Meadow is currently a sea of zinnias, and you should go swimming there.

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.

Purple Hyacinth Bean – Tram Stops 5, 6, 7

This easy to grow annual vine (*Lablab purpureus*) is cherished for its handsome foliage, stems, flowers, and fruit. The leaves are dark green with dark purple venation; the stems are the same dark purple; the flower clusters are a beautiful pale purple; the bean pods are crayon-box purple; and if that wasn't enough, open the pod and the beans themselves are a showy black and white. This is an heirloom plant, and was a favorite at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Our seeds came from Missouri in a Mason jar and were shared by one of our Horticulturists. The women in her family have grown it for generations.

Coast Redwood – NATO Hill, Pollinator Garden

The tallest single tree on Earth is a coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) named Hyperion, and it grows in the narrow fog belt along the coast of Northern California where the species is native. The last time it was measured, Hyperion was over 380' tall! The species also grows surprisingly well on the "other coast" here at NBG, though at not quite that height. Unfortunately, we have lost one of ours due to a lightning strike in late spring. However, we have several others, including the former state champion which grows adjacent to our Butterfly House.

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.

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.

Smooth-Barked St. John's Wort – NATO Tower

Endangered in its native Florida, this rare St. John's Wort (*Hypericum lissophloeus*) has delicate wispy foliage and handsome, cinnamon colored, exfoliating bark, but also has the same bright yellow flowers so characteristic of all *Hypericum*.

Korean Sweetheart Tree – Sensory Garden

This unusual tree was first introduced to the country by the late J.C. Raulston who brought seeds back from Korea to grow on at the North Carolina State Arboretum. Despite its rare and exotic nature, it is very easy to grow in our climate. The flowers bloom in late spring, and while they lack much "sales appeal" the fruit they produce is very showy, heart shaped, and turn a beautiful red in late summer to fall. We have found that just one sweetheart tree sulks and is a bit of a lonely heart not producing much fruit. However, plant two near each other, and it is true love at first sight.

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.

Hummingbird Plant – Canal Walk, Hummingbird Garden

This South American perennial (*Dicliptera squarrosa*) is a blooming machine, flowering from early summer into fall, attracting hummingbirds with its bright red-orange flowers. It is very heat and drought tolerant, and it thrives in our humidity.

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 – One of the most common and easily recognizable birds in the Garden is the Northern Cardinal. It is also one of the most common state birds and has been chosen by Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, West Virginia, **and Virginia**.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture