

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Mid to Late March 2023

Ornamental Cherries – Japanese Garden, Boat Basin, Canal Walk, Arboretum, Garden-Wide

At the moment, the autumn flowering cherry (*Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis'*) and the weeping cherries (*P. subhirtella 'Pendula'*) are at peak bloom, but they will likely not last past the middle of the month. Next up is the Yoshino cherry (*P. x yedoensis*) which 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 (*P. serrulata 'Kwanzan'*), the last cherry of the season.

Azaleas – Garden Wide

This iconic shrub will soon drape the Garden in an array of colors. At the moment, only the early varieties are showing color, but they should reach their peak bloom near the first of April this year. While you are enjoying the colors, please remember to thank the ladies and gentlemen who cleared the wild brush that was here to plant azaleas way back in 1938.

Orchids – Tropical Display House

The weather may still be a little chilly outside, but it is balmy in our Tropical Display House, and that is just how the plants in there like it, including our exotic orchid collection. At this time of year, they enter their peak bloom season. As the season progresses stop by often to see what might be in bloom.

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. This has been a spectacular year for the camellias at NBG, but see them soon as it is getting late in their season.

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, but you will want to catch them soon. 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, Discovery Grove, 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. Catch them quickly, their blooms do not last forever.

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 the branches, reminiscent of gold tinsel. The finest specimen of this plant grows in our Matson Garden.

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.

Carolina Jessamine – Butterfly Restrooms, WOW

Although the sight of its intensely colored, canary yellow flowers is 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.

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.

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 21-23th.

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 only just started to open in parts of the Garden and should be at peak bloom in just a few weeks.

Hellebores – Baker Hall, Border Garden, Winter Garden, Baker Overlook, and more

There are many species and varieties of hellebore (*Helleborus*), and as a group they tend to be tough, shade-loving, evergreen, and rarely plagued by insects, disease, deer, or rabbits. However, the best thing about them is that they bloom in the dead of winter when most perennials are still very much dormant. This year they seem to be hanging on to their blooms much longer than is typical.

Loropetalum – Boat Basin, WOW, Border Garden

This plant (*Loropetalum chinense*) is relatively new to local landscapes, but it has become quite popular with home gardeners and professionals alike. Some say maybe even too popular. It is easy to see why because many of the varieties available have attractive bright pink blooms, handsome burgundy foliage, and most have a very easy-to-grow nature.

Wildlife Watch – The local birding world has been all atwitter about the great horned owl family that is making NBG home.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture