

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Early September 2023

Crapemyrtles – Garden-wide

Norfolk Botanical Garden has the only 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 Huette 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 this year the cool spring delayed their blooms by several weeks, and this summer's abundant rain has extended their blooms even further.

Longleaf Pine – Virginia Native Plant Garden

Though they are locally scarce now, this tree (*Pinus palustris*) played a big role in this region's history, and is often referred to as "The Tree that Built Tidewater". It was used extensively in Colonial times both for its timber, and for its tar and pitch, helping to establish Coastal Virginia as a shipbuilding center. At the Virginia Native Plant Garden you can see a young longleaf pine savannah coming into its own.

Hops – Grain and Hops Garden

Beer wouldn't be beer without the distinct flavor of hops (*Humulus lupulus*). Our plants are currently fully budded and growing on teepee-like structures, and we have already had the first harvest. You will soon be able to taste our efforts in a brew produced by COVA Brewing on Shore Dr. in Norfolk's East Beach.

Hardy Ginger – Subtropical Garden

Gardeners in Coastal Virginia are fortunate enough to live in a climate where a variety of hardy gingers (*Hedychium* species) can grow. They bring any garden a touch of the tropics with their bold foliage and exotic flowers, some of which are quite fragrant. Late summer is the best time to see their gorgeous blooms.

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.

Panicle Hydrangeas – Kaufman Hydrangea Garden, Flowering Arboretum, Garden-wide

Although the more familiar bigleaf hydrangeas tend to hold their bloom color well into summer, often ageing gracefully, they are now past their bright peak. However, the panicle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) came into their own in July, looking good all summer. These differ not only in bloom time, but unlike many other hydrangeas, they do well in full sun. The flowers usually emerge a fresh greenish white, mature to pure white, then age to a dusky pink later in the summer.

Boneset – Pollinator Demonstration Garden

This North American native (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) has a long history of medicinal use, and was once quite common in herb gardens. While caution should be exercised in using it as a treatment, it should be liberally applied to any garden where butterflies and other insect pollinators are desired.

Ornamental Grasses – Garden-wide

There are many ornamental grasses at NBG with multiple species represented. They are the perfect way to add texture to the landscape, and with a slight breeze they also add movement. Late in the summer many varieties are in full flower.

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.

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 still blooming but beautiful red hips are ripening, extending the season of interest beyond the blooms. Health tip – rose hips are extremely nutritious and are an especially rich source for vitamin C.

Hardy Bananas – Sub-tropical Garden

While most banana species are tropical and will not survive our winters, they are still used extensively for summer plantings to add an exotic touch to landscapes. However, there are several hardy species that will survive our winters here in Coastal Virginia, going dormant at the first freeze and coming back again once temperatures warm again in spring.

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 in fall. They prefer full sun in consistently moist soil. Our Flowering Arboretum is home to the state champion.

Wildflower Meadow

A late summer crop of zinnias is in full bloom right now in our wildflower meadow, blooming in a rainbow of colors for your favorite photo-op. Be sure to tag us with #nbgblooms.

Butterfly House

Our butterfly house opened in late June, and it is full of colorful native butterflies and the plants they need to survive. Our volunteers and interns can answer any question you might have on how to make your own garden more butterfly friendly.

Bonsai Collection – Transition Garden

NBG is somewhat unique that our bonsai collection is managed by a group of dedicated and passionate 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 plants growing in our gardens or nursery.

Wildlife Watch – Throughout the Garden, goldfinches are feasting on the seeds of purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). The females are sensibly colored with brown above and yellow below, while the males are much flashier in nearly all yellow.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture