

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Late January/Early February 2024

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. The cold weather earlier in January damaged many of the open flowers, but the buds were not damaged and are opening again.

Hybrid Hellebores – The Winter Garden

Within the past few decades plant breeders have been busy with different *Helleborus* species, crossing them back and forth, looking for something new and different. In our Winter Garden you can see some of the results of this effort with varieties that are reliably evergreen, sterile (will not seed around), bloom earlier, and with upright flowers on sturdy stems you can actually see without having to get down on your knees. Look for 'Cinnamon Snow', 'Mahogany Snow', and 'Joseph Lempler', and others.

Bearsfoot Hellebore – Border Garden, Infinity Garden

This plant (*Helleborus foetidus*) also goes by the name of dungwort, reeking hellebore, stinking hellebore, and in fact, *foetidus* means smelly. However, you have to crush the stems and foliage to get the aroma, otherwise it is perfectly respectable. It has quite an unusual flower with celadon green petals edged in burgundy, and the evergreen foliage is handsome as well.

Winterberry Holly – Holly Garden, WOW, Le Jardin

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 dropping, though the branches are not bare on the female of the species. They are covered in clusters of bright red, showy fruit which usually persists into January when overwintering birds will make a meal of them.

'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' Daffodil – Border Garden

Like clockwork, this wonderful daffodil is always the first to boom, and always beginning in January. It was first bred sometime before 1943 in England by Mr. F. Herbert Chapman. Perhaps Mr. Chapman was slow to register his prize, because a Dutch company claimed it was theirs, putting their own name on it in 1956. Who knew the world of daffodils was full of such intrigue?

Coral Bark Japanese Maple – Le Jardin

While most Japanese maples are noted for their spring and fall foliage, this one (*Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku') is noted for its handsome coral-red stems which become particularly colorful in cold weather. You should see them covered in snow – what a photo op!

'Bihou' Japanese Maple - Hofheimer Camellia Garden

Just like the Coral Bark, 'Bihou' is a Japanese maple noted for its winter bark color. In this case it is a beautiful golden yellow.

Orchids – Tropical Display House

The weather may be cold 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 begin their main bloom season, which usually peaks in March. As winter progresses stop by often to see what might be in bloom.

Colorful Conifers – Conifer Garden, Garden-wide

While we have conifers throughout our 175 acres, the best place to see them is in the Conifer Garden. In the winter the foliage of many conifers intensifies in color and you can see rich silvery blues, dusky purples, and golden yellows.

Winter Jasmine – WOW, Holly Garden

Each winter, this plant (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) graces us with bright yellow blooms on evergreen stems. It is a sprawling haystack of a shrub, not for gardeners who like neat and tidy control, but for those that like carefree abandon, no matter the time of year, it is perfect. Thrives in full sun with neglect.

Laurustinus – Border Garden

Covered in masses of dusky pink buds, laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus* 'Compactum') will soon be covered in clusters of small blush white flowers. 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.

Sarcandra – The Winter Garden

With its bright orange-red berries and evergreen foliage, *Sarcandra glabra* is a standout in the winter landscape. It is native to Southeast Asia where it has long been used medicinally, and now its healing properties are being investigated by Western medicine. Regardless, it is very pretty.

Japanese Flowering Apricots – Blocker Terrace, Japanese Garden, Le Jardin

Native to China and grown extensively in Japan, Japanese apricots (*Prunus mume*) are revered in both countries for their winter blooms, reminders that change is on its way. They come in shades of red, pink, or white, but as colorful as they are, your nose may notice them first. They are delightfully fragrant!

'Townhouse' Crapemyrtle – Matson Garden

Most people associate crapemyrtles with summer, but many of them stand out in the winter landscape with their muscular trunks and handsome bark. One of the best at NBG is the 'Townhouse' crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia fauriei* 'Townhouse') in the Matson Garden. It also happens to be the Virginia State Champion. Without its leaves you can really appreciate its dark chocolate colored bark. If we happen to get any snow this winter to really bring out that color, be sure to come back with your camera for an Instagram-worthy moment.

Snowdrops – The Glade

One of the first bulbs to emerge in the season are snowdrops (*Galanthus elwesii*). In fact, these lovely white flowers will often push up through snow, the cold rarely bothering them. They don't last long, so head towards *Le Jardin* and look on your left in The Glade by the brick walkway, and you will see them blooming underneath a deciduous azalea cluster.

Fatsia – Infinity Garden, Border Garden, Garden-wide

For gardeners with dense shade and root competition from large trees, it can be hard to find tolerant broadleaf evergreens. However, fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*) can handle it, all while giving your garden a tropical look. Earlier in December they flowered, attracting insect pollinators, and now their handsome green seedheads are gracing the plants. Later these will ripen and turn almost black, providing welcome food for songbirds.

Wildlife Watch – Pelicans, pelicans, pelicans! These magnificent birds have taken up winter residence in the Boat Basin where they are feasting on a herring-like fish, gizzard shad.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture