

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Late February/Early March 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.

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.

Early Daffodils – Garden-wide

Isn't it too early for daffodils? Not at all. With the right selection you can have them blooming from January through April. However, our peak season is usually in March when we will be celebrating Daffodil Daze.

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!

Baby's Breath Spirea – Sensory Garden

Delicate white flowers open in late winter, and it is the first spirea (*Spiraea thunbergii*) to bloom. 'Ogon' has pure white flowers which will later be followed by handsome chartreuse foliage. 'Fujino Pink' has pink buds that open to blush white flowers, then next December the foliage will turn multicolored shades of red, orange, and yellow.

Orchids – Tropical Display House

The weather may still 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.

Cornelian Cherry – Picnic Area

Although the common name for this plant might lead you to believe it is a cherry, it is actually an Asian dogwood (*Cornus mas* 'Spring Glow'). With its bright yellow blooms, it is one of the earliest of the small flowering trees to show its colors. By the way, that common name comes from the showy red fruit that will form later this summer.

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 Daphne – The Glade

This plant (*Daphne odora*) has a well deserved reputation for being finicky. Not too wet, not too dry, not too sunny, not too shady, and even when the stars align and a perfect spot is found – they can die for no apparent reason. So why bother? The thickly sweet fragrance is profound, one plant capable of perfuming an entire garden. Pro-tip: once planted, never say its name, just enjoy.

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.

Edgeworthia – Winter Garden, Statuary Vista

This plant is sometimes referred to as paperbush, but so are other plants, so we stick to with its botanical name of *Edgeworthia* to avoid confusion. The silvery buds form in December and open in February to clusters of golden yellow, sweetly fragrant flowers. It is one of our favorite winter blooming shrubs.

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 – Many double-breasted cormorants make their home on Lake Whitehurst. Here they can pursue their two favorite activities, fishing in the lake and resting on many of the Garden's trees that jut out over the water.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture