

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Mid to Late March 2024

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 early this year, near the first of April. 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.

Daffodils – Garden-wide

We are seeing these harbingers of spring popping up all over the Garden, March is their peak season, but if you plan carefully, you can have them blooming in your own garden from December to April.

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. They will be reaching the end of their season soon, so see them while you can.

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.

Orchids – Tropical Display House

The weather may be warming, but it is still too cold outside for our exotic orchid collection. Although we always have orchids blooming in our Tropical Display House, March is typically their peak month.

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.

Forsythia – Baker Overlook, Holly Garden

Some gardeners might turn up their nose at the thought of the common forsythia (*Forsythia* species and hybrids), but some things are common for a reason. This plant is reliable, easy to grow, good for flower arrangements, and its bright yellow flowers announce that spring is here.

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.

Laurustinus – Border Garden

Over the winter, these plants (*Viburnum tinus* 'Compactum') were covered in masses of dusky pink buds, and with the warming weather and longer days, these have now opened to 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.

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.

Lady Banks Rose – Rose Garden, Baker Perennial Garden

Always the first rose to bloom, Lady Banks (*Rosa banksiae*) is unlike any other in that it not only blooms very early, but it is also thornless, quite vigorous, and is never plagued by the same diseases that other roses get. For the plant nerds among us – the world's largest Lady Banks rose has been growing in Tombstone, AZ since 1885 and covers a whopping 8000 square feet!

Southern Rabbiteye Blueberries – Kitchen Garden, Pollinator Demonstration Garden

There are many reasons to grow this variety of blueberry (*Vaccinium ashei*). They are not only the best type to grow in a hot and humid climate like ours, but they also have lovely flowers in March that attract pollinators, they bear large fruit in June that is not only delicious, but it is good for you, and in the fall they foliage turns beautiful shades of red and orange. Having multiple seasons of interest, they can be used anywhere in the garden.

Wildlife Watch – Tundra swans have been spotted flying over the Garden on their annual migration from their winter homes in place like Back Bay and Mackay Island Wildlife Refuge to their summer home in Alaska.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture