

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Mid-Spring 2024

Roses – Bicentennial Rose Garden

NBG has one of the largest rose gardens on the East Coast. Typically, they will peak near Mothers' Day weekend, but we will have blooms through the fall.

Satsuki Azaleas – Airport Berm, Garden Wide

This group of azaleas are the last to bloom for the season. Satsuki means fifth month in Japanese, which is appropriate for these azaleas as they always bloom in May. In general, Satsukis are lower, wide spreading, have large single flowers, and can come in unusual color combinations.

Kousa Dogwood – Garden Wide

The other dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) is an Asian cousin to our own flowering dogwood and state tree (*Cornus florida*), but with notable differences. Kousa dogwoods get their leaves first, then the flowers appear afterwards, seeming to float atop the branches. They are also somewhat easier to grow than our native, being more resistant to insects and diseases. Like our native, the flowers are beautiful; the fruits are eaten by local wildlife; and in fall their foliage turns handsome colors before dropping to reveal attractive bark.

Japanese Maples – Japanese Garden, The Glade, Rhododendron Garden

Though they are typically associated with beautiful fall color, the spring foliage of Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) can be just as colorful, if not more so on some varieties. NBG has over 100 different varieties of this elegant tree.

Fenway Park Boston Ivy – Fragrance Garden

Found just outside of Fenway Park in Boston, this Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata* 'Fenway Park') has dramatic golden yellow new growth, maturing to chartreuse in summer, and going red in the fall. You don't have to be a Sox fan to enjoy it.

Star Jasmine – Circle Garden

This Southern favorite (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) is one of the most fragrant vines filling the air with its vanilla-like fragrance. It is evergreen, thrives in heat and humidity, but Coastal Virginia is about as far north as it will tolerate.

Red Hot Poker – Butterfly Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, NATO Tower, and elsewhere

This South African plant (*Kniphofia* species and hybrids) sends up tall dramatic spikes of orange, red, yellow, to white flowers, often with several different colors at the same time. They prefer full sun in very well drained soil, attract hummingbirds, and they make a great cut flower as well.

Pomegranate – Japanese Garden, Sensory Garden

Even if pomegranates (*Punica granatum*) never provided deliciously tart fruit, high in anti-oxidants, it would be worth growing for its orangiest of orange flowers. So rich and bright that sun glasses are recommended.

Indian Pinks – Canal Walk, Pollinator Demo Garden

This unusual native perennial (*Spigelia marlandica*) has showy red and yellow trumpet like flowers. It grows best in light wooded shade. One look and you will likely want to see this plant in your own garden. Unfortunately, it can be frustratingly difficult to find in local nurseries.

Mountain Laurel – Mirror Lake This native plant (*Kalmia latifolia*) is one of North America's loveliest shrubs. The flowers come in shades of pink, white, and red, and their unusual buds and blooms are best appreciated up close. Although they have a reputation for being difficult to grow, where they are happy they are prolific – like Mirror Lake.

Oakleaf Hydrangeas – Colonial Garden, Rose Garden Bridge, Garden-wide

This hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) is the hydrangea for all seasons. At this time of year its flowers are the star with their white, showy, conical shape. Later in the summer the flowers age gracefully to a dusty pink, followed by a straw color. In the fall the foliage turns a handsome red, to burgundy, to orange. It is the best hydrangea species for fall foliage color. Even in winter they attract attention with their cinnamon colored exfoliating bark.

Southern Magnolia – Flowering Arboretum

This is one of the classic trees (*Magnolia grandiflora*) of Southern gardens. Large white flowers are open right now, and they have an intoxicating fragrance. Evergreen, native, wind-resistant, they are easy to grow in full sun to partial shade. However, they can be very messy. Even though they are evergreen, the leaves will drop, just not all at once, and they take a very long time to decompose. If the branches are allowed to remain low to the ground this will hide many of those fallen leaves.

Hostas – Statuary Vista, Admin Welcome Garden, Garden-wide

This familiar garden perennial prefers shady locations, especially in Southern climates. Grown primarily for their diverse foliage textures and colors, there are several thousand different varieties to choose from. While NBG does not have quite that many, it does have enough to qualify as designated hosta garden, so says the American Hosta Society.

Pitcher Plants – Virginia Native Plant Garden Some of our most unusual native plants are the native pitcher plants (*Sarracenia* species). They have flowers like few others, and the plants themselves are made up of colorful pitcher-like structures. However, there is a dark side. Pitcher plants are carnivorous and lure unsuspecting insects into their pitchers, where the prey will find the structure covered in downward facing hairs which make it impossible to climb out. Waiting at the bottom of the pitcher is not sweet tea, but digestive juices ready to help turn insects into plant food.

Virginia Sweetspire – WOW, Boat Basin, and many other places

This plant (*Itea virginica*) is one of our great native shrubs. In mid to late spring it is covered in white bottlebrush flowers, which are beautiful, but this plant is as equally known for its colorful fall foliage which turns shades of red, orange, yellow, and burgundy. Easy to grow, this plant prefers full sun to partial shade in moist well drained soil, but it is adaptable and drought tolerant once established.

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 – Wood ducks have been spotted along Lake Whitehurst near Cobblestone Bridge. They like wooded swamps and prefer nesting in tree cavities or specially designed boxes. They are one of the few duck species with strong claws, used for gripping and perching in trees.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture