

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Early Summer 2024

Hydrangeas – Kaufman Hydrangea Garden

June is peak bloom here for most *Hydrangea* species, and our Kaufman Hydrangea Garden has many different varieties. Early in the season, the big leaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) are the showiest and the most colorful. Later in July, the panicle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) with their cool white blooms will be the stars of the collection.

Roses – Bicentennial Rose Garden

NBG has one of the largest rose gardens on the East Coast. Although they will bloom from mid-spring until the first good freeze, their peak bloom is typically around Mother's Day, and again in October when the weather cools.

Oleander – Subtropical Garden, WOW, and other places

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) is native to North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean where it thrives in that hot, dry climate. Coastal Virginia is just warm enough in the winter to allow this evergreen to grow, but even then, a very cold winter can knock it to the ground. In early summer it is covered with pink, red, white, or even pale-yellow blooms. Not only can it take heat and drought, but it is very tolerant of salt spray and sandy soil, so it is perfect for beach landscapes. Just beware, it is very toxic if eaten making it a nearly rabbit and deer proof plant !

Papyrus – Renaissance Court

Growing in pots in the fountain at Renaissance Court this summer is papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), one of the most important plants to ancient Egyptian culture. Not only was it used to make one of the earliest forms of paper, but it was also cultivated for food, medicine, and boats were made with bundles of its stems.

Rattlesnake Master – Admin Welcome Garden

This eye-catching, native plant (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) with the unique name has slightly spiny leaves arranged in a rosette resembling yucca. The flower stems shoot skyward in summer and are topped with white, bristly flowers that attract a variety of butterflies and beneficial insects. Native Americans brewed a tea from the root as an antidote to rattlesnake venom, hence the common name. However, we recommend a quick trip to the ER instead.

Crinum Lily – Baker Perennial Garden, Boat Basin, Conifer Garden

Crinums (*Crinum* species and hybrids) are native around the world in tropical areas. Over the years they have been bred and hybridized for increased hardiness and flower power. They have long been an old Southern favorite with their bold strap like foliage and showy pink, to red, to white flowers.

Blazing Star – WOW, Border Garden, and others

Blazing star (*Liatris spicata*) is one of our most dramatic native perennials producing tall spikes of purple-pink flowers that are very attractive to both people and pollinators. It is just one of several North American *Liatris* species. They also make a superb cut-flower, just make sure you plant a few extra to leave in the garden for those pollinators.

Daylilies – Baker Perennial Garden

Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* species and hybrids) are one of the easiest, most satisfying, and most colorful perennials. Our large collection in the Baker Perennial Garden would not be possible without the support we have received from the Tidewater Daylily Society.

Chaste Tree – Hummingbird Garden, Virginia Native Plant Garden, Canal Bank

Chaste tree's (*Vitex agnus-castus*) common name comes from the fact that people believed (erroneously) that the influence from this tree would keep one's thoughts and desires pure. It was also said that the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome would adorn themselves with this plant as a symbol of their chastity. That may be a lot to ask of a plant, but who doesn't like a tree with blue flowers?

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.

Sacred Lotus – Japanese Garden

There are few flowers more attractive and eye-catching than that of sacred lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*). The fragrant blossoms are shades of a delicate pink, surrounding a central pod. This edible and medicinal wetland plant is revered in Asian cultures for its ability to cleanly rise above the muck and mud with such beauty. After the blooms have gone, the attractive seed pods will remain and are prized by flower arrangers. You can enjoy these flowers up close and personal from the stone footbridge in our Japanese Garden.

Butterfly House – Butterfly Garden

Our butterfly house is open from mid-June until late September. Inside you will not only find an assortment of butterflies native to Virginia, but you will also find volunteers and interns who can tell you everything you need to know. Both inside the house and in the Butterfly Garden you can see a wide variety of plants that attract adult butterflies, but just as important you will see a variety of host plants that caterpillars need.

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 – In a recent bio-survey conducted at NBG, the Va. Herpetological Society said we are reptile and amphibian "hot spot". So, keep your eyes peeled for some cool critters.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture