

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – July 2024

Crapemyrtles – Garden-wide

Norfolk Botanical Garden has the only recognized collection of crapemyrtles (*Lagerstroemia* species and hybrids) in North America, and likely the world. Our climate is extremely well adapted to their growth, closely mimicking the climate of their native Asia. They have been an important part of our collection since Fred Huette first encouraged area gardeners to plant them last century. Today they are the official tree of the city of Norfolk, and comprise over half of all street trees on city property.

Panicle Hydrangeas – Kaufman Hydrangea Garden, Flowering Arboretum, Garden-wide

Although the more familiar bigleaf hydrangeas tend to hold their bloom color well into summer, often ageing gracefully, they are now past their bright peak. However, the panicle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) came into their own in early July. These differ not only in bloom time, but unlike many other hydrangeas, they do well in full sun. The flowers usually emerge a fresh greenish white, mature to pure white, then age to a dusky pink later in the summer.

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.

Joe-Pye Weed – Pollinator Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, Border Garden, and elsewhere

These tall robust plants (*Eutrochium* species) are a spectacular summer blooming native perennial. Their large mauve flowerheads are very attractive to butterflies, and later on, seed-eating birds will relish the ripe seeds. The plants namesake was purported to be a native American herbal healer who used a variety of plants to treat illness, including Joe-Pye weed.

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.

Black-eyed Susans – Garden-wide

One of the most prolific genera of North American native plants is *Rudbeckia*, commonly referred to as black or brown-eyed Susan, or coneflower. There are many different species that do well in our climate and summer is their season to shine. Their flowers attract insect pollinators, and their ripe seeds offer many birds sustenance.

Rose Glory Bower – Colonial Garden

While many members of this plant's family are tropical, this variety (*Clerodendrum bungei*) is hardy, perhaps a bit too hardy. Topped with large, showy clusters of pink flowers, this perennial is an aggressive spreader. It is probably good that we have it confined to a small bed, surrounded by cobblestones and asphalt on all sides.

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 – Spiny softshell turtles are not native to Norfolk, rather a good part of the Mississippi watershed. However, they can be found in Lake Whitehurst where they were introduced. If you see a large flat turtle, with a head that looks like a snake, it could be the spiny softshell. Unlike the cliché, they move incredibly fast when threatened, maybe as fast as that hare.