

norfolk botanical garden

HORTICULTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Horticultural Highlights – Fall 2024

Fall Foliage – Garden Wide

Although there is lots of fall foliage color in the Garden right now, we will likely not reach peak fall color until sometime between early and mid-November. Some of the best places to enjoy it are Mirror Lake, The Enchanted Forest, The Glade, Shady Woods, and along the road between the Hofheimer Camellia Garden and the Rhododendron Garden.

Sasanqua Camellias – Hofheimer Camellia Garden

Just as many other plants are turning brown and going dormant, fall blooming camellias (*Camellia sasanqua* and hybrids) color the landscape with pinks, reds, and whites. While the flowers are smaller than the more familiar Japanese camellias, there are more blooms per plant on sasanquas, plus they are delightfully fragrant.

American Beautyberry – Pollinator Demonstration Garden

Clusters of colorful fruit adorn the branches of this native shrub (*Callicarpa americana*) every year in early fall, and they are the perfect shade of crayon-box-purple. Not only are they attractive to humans, but several bird species enjoy the ripe fruit. As an added bonus, the foliage has mosquito repelling properties.

Kiwifruit – WOW

Formerly known as Chinese gooseberries, this fruit (*Actinidia deliciosa*) underwent a marketing plan that included a name change, and it is now associated most commonly with New Zealand. Fortunately, the climate in Coastal Virginia is mild enough to grow this beautiful vine that bears delicious fruit. The plant is normally dioecious, meaning there are separate male and female plants with both needed for fruit to grow on the female. However, agricultural breeding has led to a few self-fertile varieties.

Winterberry Holly – Holly Garden, Discovery Grove

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 falling, though the branches are not bare. They are covered in clusters of bright red, showy fruit which usually persists until January when overwintering birds will make a meal of them.

Lion's Tale – Fragrance Garden

Even though this unusual plant (*Leonotis leonurus*) hails from South Africa and is happier in that climate, it can be hardy in Coastal Virginia if it is sited where it gets some winter protection in extremely well drained soil. In mid-fall it is covered with bizarre, but very attractive, bright orange flowers.

Ornamental Grasses – Garden-wide

There are many ornamental grasses at NBG with multiple species represented. They are the perfect way to add texture to the landscape, and with a slight breeze they also add movement. Late in the summer and into fall many varieties are in full flower.

Common Persimmon – Wildflower Meadow, Garden-wide

This tree (*Diospyros virginiana*) is a Coastal Virginia native with nutritious fruit for wildlife and humans alike, you just need to wait until it is ripe. It is the host plant for several moth species, insect pollinators are attracted to its late spring flowers, and mammals and birds enjoy the ripe fruit. Tough and durable, it withstands whatever conditions Mother Nature gives it, including drought, salt spray, and flooding. It also has attractive fall foliage and distinctively unusual bark.

Hardy Chrysanthemum – Border Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, Bicentennial Rose Garden

Just about everyone is familiar with fall mums, you can barely leave the grocery store or hardware store without running into racks of them. While these will come back in Coastal Virginia, they take a lot of work to look the same. Hardy chrysanthemums are blooming right now, and with no effort on the part of our gardeners. Look for 'Ryan's Pink', 'Hillside Pink Sheffield', or 'Cambodian Queen'.

Cotton – WOW Grain Plain

Cotton (*Gossypium* species) is one of the most important commercial crops in the world, and was first domesticated as early as 5000 B.C. A member of the mallow family, some of its botanical cousins are okra, hibiscus, and hollyhock. Despite being grown for utilitarian purposes, it has beautiful flowers as well.

Loofah Sponge – Kitchen Garden

Covered with bright yellow flowers and large cucumber-like fruit, this annual vine (*Luffa aegyptiaca*) is currently living its best life, seemingly oblivious to the coming winter cold which will kill it. Making hay while the sun shines! The cucumber resemblance is no coincidence, they are both in the same family along with squash and pumpkins.

Moss Paths – Rhododendron Garden

Moss thrives in soil that is compacted, shaded, and acidic. In fact, this ancient evergreen grows where many other things will not. In the Rhododendron Garden, a series of our Horticulturists have spent years encouraging it to grow by watering it during droughts, keeping fallen leaves from smothering it, and patching bare spots with moss from elsewhere. All those years of diligence have paid off, and now we have paths covered by green carpets. Take a look for yourself, and no one will mind if you take off your shoes for a stroll.

Yucca – Lower Admin Parking Garden

Right now flaccid leaf yucca (*Yucca flaccida* 'Blue Sentry') is in full bloom. The flower spikes contain numerous white flowers which are pollinated exclusively by the yucca moth who also enjoy the flower's nectar. In exchange for providing pollination services, the moth lays her eggs in a ball of yucca pollen which she deposits on the stamens. The subsequent larvae feed on a few of the plant's seeds, but leaf enough viable for the yucca to reproduce. Symbiosis – it's a beautiful thing.

'Victory' Pyracantha – Border Garden

Dripping with red-orange fruit, the ungainly pyracantha (*Pyracantha koidzumii* 'Victory') can't decide if it wants to be a shrub or a vine. The birds don't care, they just bide their time waiting for the fruit to ever so slightly ferment. Once it crosses that threshold, then an avian feast begins. Not only do they relish the fruit, but pyracantha makes for good shelter being evergreen and thorny, protecting them from both cold weather and predators.

Bonsai Collection – Transition Garden

NBG is somewhat unique in that our bonsai collection is co-managed by a bonsai specialist and 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 – If you see a rotund furry rodent, about the size of very well-fed cat, near our greenhouse, that would be a groundhog. They are not a gardener's favorite friend, so please kindly ask it to move on and stay away from our plants.