

Horticultural Highlights – July 2025

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 Huetten 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 (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) 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*) come 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.

'Peggy Martin' Rose – Cobblestone Bridge

During Hurricane Katrina, Ms. Peggy Martin's New Orleans garden was flooded and remained under saltwater for several weeks. There were only 2 plants to survive, and one was this rose, a.k.a. The Hurricane Katrina rose. We have found it to be exceptionally vigorous, a long bloomer, and virtually disease free, but give her room – she grows how she wants.

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 plant's namesake was purported to be a native American herbal healer who used a variety of plants to treat illness, including Joe-Pye weed.

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 pale green to 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.

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.

Kentucky Coffee Tree – Flowering Arboretum

This large tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*) is native from southern Canada throughout the eastern and central United States, but in Virginia it only occurs in the far southwest. It is dioecious, meaning there are male trees and female trees. The females produce distinctive flat seed pods that are prominent right now. The common name comes from the fact that Native Americans ground the roasted seeds to make a coffee-like beverage, albeit caffeine-free. Beware, unroasted seeds are toxic!

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.

Gordonia/Loblolly Bay – Flowering Arboretum

One of the Southeast's most underappreciated trees, Gordonia (*Gordonia lasianthus*) looks like a camellia on steroids when it is in bloom. In fact, it is a member of the same family as the more familiar camellia. In summer, beautiful white flowers cover the tree. Gordonia's are largely evergreen, but sometimes a few leaves will turn a glossy red. They prefer full sun in consistently moist soil. Our Flowering Arboretum is home to the state champion.

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.

Common Rose Mallow – Frog Bog (WOW)

This plant (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) is North America's most widely distributed hibiscus, native from Canada to Florida and west to Texas and New Mexico. It has beautiful white (sometimes pink) flowers with crimson eyes that easily bloom in high summer. They like full sun in moist soil, and thrive in wet areas.

Wildflower Meadow

The summer blooms of assorted zinnias and cosmos are very colorful right now, and will make for the perfect Instagram moment.

Butterfly House

In the NBG Butterfly House you can not only see a wide variety of native butterflies, but you can also see their caterpillars and chrysalises, learn which plants they like, and you can talk with knowledgeable volunteers and interns. You can also see why our butterfly house was voted the best in the country by readers of USA Today!

Bonsai Collection – Transition Garden

NBG has a unique bonsai collection that is managed by our in-house 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 garden plants growing in our gardens or nursery.

Wildlife Watch – What's chubby, furry, and adorably cute to everyone but gardeners? That would be groundhogs (a.k.a. woodchucks or whistlepigs), the largest member of the squirrel family. While their largely vegetarian diet might be healthy for them, it is not good for the plants here at NBG. If you see one, kindly ask it live somewhere else.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture