Horticultural Highlights – October 2025

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. The early varieties begin blooming in the first few weeks of October, but their peak is typically mid-November.

American Beautyberry – Pollinator Demonstration Garden, Virginia Native Plant 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

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. Many varieties throughout the Garden are now in full bloom.

The Wildflower Meadow

There is a late-season burst of color going on in our Wildflower Meadow right now. Multi-colored zinnias and golden yellow cosmos are in full bloom. The mulched path going through is the perfect Instagram or TikTok spot.

Hardy Chrysanthemum – Border Garden, Baker Perennial Garden, 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’.

Angel’s Trumpet – Baker Overlook

These showy plants (*Brugmansia* species and hybrids) are currently blooming with large trumpet-like, coral-pink blooms that hang down from the branches. They are really stunning and very exotic looking, and indeed they are exotic being native to the Andes. We are growing them as far north as they can tolerate. With the onset of cold weather, they will die to ground, but arise again in early summer, then bloom in the fall. Don’t let the reference to angels fool you, they are highly poisonous if ingested.

‘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 bid 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 the birds from both cold winds and predators.

Raydon’s Favorite Aster – Canal Walk, Conifer Garden

We have to agree with Raydon, this particular aromatic aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) is our favorite as well. Stunning, billowy clouds of purple blue flowers are blooming right now, attracting numerous beneficial pollinators trying to get another meal in before cold weather gets here.

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.

Encore Azaleas – NATO Triangle and Garden-wide
We all recognize azaleas as one of the icons of the spring garden, but Encore azaleas have been bred to bloom in the fall and summer as well. Although their bloom time differs, they take the same conditions and care as most other azaleas.

Japanese Loquat – Fragrance Garden
An unusual small tree, the Japanese Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) has a lot going for it. In the fall it has clusters of ivory-colored flowers whose perfume will turn heads as it wafts through the garden. Its evergreen foliage has an exotic look that will lend your landscape a tropical feel. If our winter is mild enough, golden orange, delicious fruit will develop and ripen in the spring.

Mexican Bush Sage – Kitchen Garden, Admin Welcome Garden, and other places
One of the benefits of living in gardening zone 8 is that Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*) is hardy here, and not an annual like it is further north. It usually starts blooming in September with velvety purple flowers accented by its silvery foliage. It does best in full sun, and it must have good drainage, especially in winter. Though it will take the occasional drought, it does best with even moisture.

Salt Bush – NATO Pond
Each fall, this underappreciated native shrub (*Baccharis halimifolia*) fills local shorelines with clouds of white flowers. It grows where few other plants survive, along the wet upper edges of salt marshes and other wetlands.

Flowering Dogwood – Garden-wide
Among many other admirable attributes, this tree (*Cornus florida*) is the very first tree to take on fall foliage color. Weeks before other trees even consider changing, flowering dogwood starts to turn shades of red and burgundy. It is a marker of things to come.

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.

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 – Double crested cormorants feed on fish and other aquatic organisms, and they are well adapted to do so. Did you know a group of cormorants is called a flight, or a gulp? No matter what they are called, they are year-round residents of Lake Whitehurst.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture