

Horticultural Highlights – November 2025

Fall Foliage – Garden Wide

Coastal Virginia is the last place in the state for fall color to peak, typically it is 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. The early varieties begin blooming in the first few weeks of October, but their peak is typically mid-November.

Japanese Maples – Garden-wide

One of the most spectacular plants at this time of year are the Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*). Their fall foliage colors are stunning. While we have them planted in many spots, some the best places to see them are the Japanese Garden, The Glade, and The Rhododendron Garden.

American Beautyberry – Pollinator Demonstration Garden, Virginia Native Plant Garden, Colonial 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.

Evergreen Dogwood – Hydrangea Garden

This Asian species (*Cornus elliptica*) is different from our native flowering dogwood (*C. florida*) in that it holds onto its foliage through the winter. It also blooms much later than our native, typically in May. At the moment they are showy with strawberry-like, red, edible fruit.

Kousa Dogwood – Garden Wide

Another Asian cousin (*Cornus kousa*) to our native flowering dogwood, this one is much later showing its fall colors than our own, but when it does turn it is remarkably beautiful. The leaves are a rich golden orange-yellow in the fall, and after the leaves have fallen it will be easier to see the trees' beautiful mottled bark.

'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.

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.

Winterberry Holly – Holly Garden, Discovery Grove, *Le Jardin*

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.

Japanese Loquat – Fragrance Garden, Hummingbird 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 the aroma 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.

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.

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 barefoot stroll.

Pineapple Sage – Hummingbird, Baker Perennial Garden

Late in the season pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*) begins blooming with bright red, tubular blooms. Making that color even more striking is the selection 'Golden Delicious' whose chartreuse yellow foliage really sets off the blooms. The common name comes from the flavor of the leaves, which are indeed edible, though we recommend getting your pineapple from the grocery store.

Wildlife Watch – Wood ducks have been spotted in Mirror Lake. These are one of the few ducks who perch in trees and are comfortable flying in wooded habitats. The males are spectacularly colored making identification easy.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture