

Horticultural Highlights – Late May/Early June 2026

Roses – Bicentennial Rose Garden

Get out there, and get out there now! It is a riot of color and fragrance.

Hydrangeas – Kaufman Hydrangea Garden, Garden-wide

June is peak bloom here for most Hydrangea species, and our Kaufman Hydrangea Garden has many different varieties. Right now, the oakleaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and big leaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) are the showiest and the most colorful.

Kousa Dogwood – Garden Wide

This dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) is an Asian cousin to our own flowering dogwood and state tree (*Cornus florida*), but with notable differences. Kousa dogwoods get their leaves first, then the flowers appear afterwards, seeming to float atop the branches. They are also somewhat easier to grow than our native, being more resistant to environmental stresses and diseases. Like our native, the flowers are beautiful; the fruits are eaten by local wildlife; and in fall their foliage turns handsome colors before dropping to reveal attractive bark.

Giant Century Plant – NATO Hill

Agaves often go by the name of century plant, which is a bit of a misnomer as they typically live only 10-20 years. Agaves are monocarpic, meaning they die after flowering, but not before going out with a grand show, and leaving behind a litter of “pups” to take its place. An *Agave salmiana* is about to bloom on NATO Hill like a gigantic, dramatic, mutant stalk of asparagus.

Daylilies – Baker Perennial Garden

Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* species and hybrids) are one of the easiest, most satisfying, and most colorful perennials. Our large collection in the Baker Perennial Garden would not be possible without the support we have received from the Tidewater Daylily Society.

Japanese Iris – Border Garden, Boat Basin

Japanese iris (*Iris ensata*) have large, broad, flat blooms, perfect for looking down on and photographing. Like many iris species, these prefer to grow in moist to wet soil, and over time each clump will grow bigger allowing the gardener to divide and share with friends.

Pomegranate – Japanese Garden, Sensory Garden

Even if pomegranates (*Punica granatum*) never provided deliciously tart fruit, high in anti-oxidants, it would be worth growing for its orangiest of orange flowers. So rich and bright that sun glasses are recommended.

Southern Magnolia – Flowering Arboretum

This is one of the classic trees (*Magnolia grandiflora*) of Southern gardens. Large white flowers are open 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.

Gardenia – Infinity Garden, Sub-tropical Garden

Gardenias (*Gardenia jasminoides*) have a reputation for being difficult to grow. Usually this has something to do with either drainage or cold. Coastal Virginia is in the safe zone temperature wise, but gardeners need to make sure they are planted in moist soil that drains well. They hate consistently soggy soil. Any effort is worth it, though. Their fragrance is a delicious treat.

Crinum Lily – Baker Perennial Garden, Boat Basin, Conifer Garden

Crinums (*Crinum* species and hybrids) are native around the world in tropical areas. Over the years they have been bred and hybridized for increased hardiness and flower power. They have long been an old Southern favorite with their bold strap like foliage and showy pink, to red, to white flowers.

Desert Willow – NATO Bridge

Although this unusual small tree (*Chilopsis linearis*) is native to the Southwest U.S., it is also perfectly at home here at NBG. It is covered in pink flowers now, and this particular specimen also happens to be another of our state champion trees.

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 a designated hosta garden, so says the American Hosta Society.

Indian Pink – Statuary Vista

This rare perennial (*Spigelia marlandica*) is native to the southern U.S., and it makes a great addition to lightly shaded gardens. The unusual and striking trumpet-like flowers are red on the outside and yellow in the inside, and they attract hummingbirds.

Oleander – Subtropical Garden, WOW, and other places

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) is native to North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean where it thrives in that hot, dry climate. Coastal Virginia is just warm enough in the winter to allow this evergreen to grow, but even then, a very cold winter can knock it to the ground. In early summer it is covered with pink, red, white, or even pale yellow blooms. Not only can it take heat and drought, but it is very tolerant of salt spray and sandy soil, so it is perfect for beach landscapes. Just beware, it is very toxic if eaten making it also one of the most deer-proof plants!

Giant Coneflower – Baker Perennial Garden, The Border Garden, The Butterfly Garden

A member of the black-eyed Susan family, giant coneflower (*Rudbeckia maxima*) has the typical yellow petals of its cousins, surrounding an elongated cone. Unlike others, the flower stalks can get 6-7' tall and rise above large, blue-green foliage, which gives rise to its other common name of cabbage leaf coneflower. The flowers attract a number of pollinators, and later birds will relish the seeds.

Purple Smoke Tree – Baker Perennial Garden, The Border Garden, Flowering Arboretum

Purple smoke tree, or smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple') has handsome burgundy foliage from spring through fall. However, in June it is covered in ethereal flowers that put the "smoke" in smoke tree.

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 – NBG is home to a number of animals that have learned that humans often have food. Please remember that the best things for our crows, turtles, fish, geese, foxes, squirrels, and other clever animals to eat is what they find in nature, and not your leftover sandwich or potato chips.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture