

## Horticultural Highlights – July 2026

### 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 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*) came 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.

### 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.

### Papyrus – Renaissance Court

Growing in pots in the fountain at Renaissance Court this summer is papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), one of the most important plants to ancient Egyptian culture. Not only was it used to make one of the earliest forms of paper, but it was also cultivated for food, medicine, and boats were made with bundles of its stems.

### 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 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.

### Black-eyed Susans – Garden-wide

One of the most prolific genera of North American native plants is *Rudbeckia*, commonly referred to as black or brown-eyed Susan, or coneflower. There are many different species that do well in our climate and summer is their season to shine. Their flowers attract insect pollinators, and their ripe seeds offer many birds sustenance.

### 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.

### Nodding Onion – Lower Admin Parking Lot, Circle Garden

This North American native (*Allium cernuum*) is also at home in Virginia. Clusters of pale pink flowers rise above the foliage and nod downward, hence the common name. Historically, it was used as food, but today it is valued more for its ornamental value.

### Gordonia/Loblolly Bay – Flowering Arboretum

One of the Southeast's most underappreciated trees, Gordonia, or Loblolly Bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*) looks like a tree-form camellia 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.

### Sunflowers – Wildflower Meadow

While there are many species of perennial sunflower, the most commonly familiar is an annual, *Helianthus annuus*. Though it has been bred for showy flowers, it has more importantly been bred to for its seeds, which are an important food, fodder, and oil crop.

### Mountain Mint – Virginia Native Plant Garden, Pollinator Demonstration Garden, and elsewhere

If you are looking to attract pollinators to your garden, you would be hard pressed to find anything better than one of our native mountain mints (*Pycnanthemum* species). There are about 20 different species in North America, and at least 15 of those occur naturally in Virginia. All of them have a delightfully minty aroma, and in bloom, they become the center of the universe for pollinator activity.

### Summersweet – Virginia Native Plant Garden, The Border Garden, and elsewhere

Another must-have to attract pollinators to your garden, summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) also attracts humans with its delightfully sweet aroma, and later the golden yellow fall foliage will add color to the autumn landscape. When in bloom, you can hear the buzzing from all the beneficial insects.

### 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. Elsewhere in the Garden, you can see a number of hybrids that typically have larger, and showier flowers, but the straight species is a delight on its own.

### Butterfly House – Butterfly Garden

Our butterfly house is open from mid-June until late September. Inside you will not only find an assortment of butterflies native to Virginia, but you will also find volunteers and interns who can tell you everything you need to know. Both inside the house and in the Butterfly Garden you can see a wide variety of plants that attract adult butterflies, but just as important you will see a variety of host plants that caterpillars need.

### 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 – Spiny softshell turtles are not native to Norfolk, rather a good part of the Mississippi watershed. However, they can be found in Lake Whitehurst where they were introduced. If you see a large flat turtle, with a head that looks like a snake, it could be the spiny softshell. Unlike the cliché, they move incredibly fast when threatened, maybe as fast as that hare.

*Les Parks, Director of Horticulture*