

Horticultural Highlights – August 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*) began blooming in early July and still look great. 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.

Fennel – Butterfly Garden

Roman soldiers were especially fond of fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) thinking it gave them strength, improved eyesight, had other healing properties, and it was also used as a symbol of victory. It seemed to have followed them all over Europe remaining long after their conquests were only subjects for history books. When Europeans settled North America, fennel was brought with them as well, and in some parts of the continent, fennel has escaped cultivation becoming a potentially invasive species, including here in Coastal Virginia. However, the butterflies love it, and you can see large stands of it in our Butterfly Garden, where our horticulturists keep a close eye on it.

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.

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 have just started to flower.

Hardy Ginger – Subtropical Garden, Cobblestone Bridge, and elsewhere

Gardeners in Coastal Virginia are fortunate enough to live in a climate where a variety of hardy gingers (*Hedychium* species) can grow. They bring any garden a touch of the tropics with their bold foliage and exotic flowers, some of which are quite fragrant.

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.

Zinnias – Wildflower Meadow

One of the most colorful photo-ops in the Garden right now is the Wildflower Meadow. Three varieties of zinnias are in full bloom, Cactus Mix, Dahlia Mix, and 'Ice Queen'. While you are taking the perfect shot, look around at all of the bee and butterfly activity these flowers attract.

Society Garlic – Admin Welcome Garden, Baker Perennial Garden

Despite being native to faraway South Africa, society garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*) does very well here. It gets its common name for the aroma of its foliage, which indeed smells like garlic. The pale violet flowers begin blooming in early summer and continue through early fall. Tolerant of heat, deer, full sun, and drought – it is an easy plant to grow.

Hybrid Magnolia – NATO Bridge

The garden is fortunate to have quite a number of hybrid magnolias that were part of a breeding program that sought to bring different flower colors, different hardiness, and evergreen foliage to the genus. Right now, there are 2 at NATO Bridge whose fruit capsules are a showy, glossy bright red – just as stunning as its flowers that bloomed earlier.

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 – Recently, staff have seen several mink in the garden. They are members of the weasel family and prefer to live near water where they eat a varied diet of crayfish, fish, amphibians, birds, and other small mammals. Their feet are webbed making them excellent swimmers.

Les Parks, Director of Horticulture