

Horticultural Highlights – September 2026

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.

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 started blooming in August and are still attractive to butterflies. Now as the seeds ripen, birds will begin to feast, especially goldfinches. The plants namesake was purported to be a native American herbal healer who used a variety of plants to treat illness, including Joe-Pye weed.

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.

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.

Marsh Rattlesnake Master – Boat Basin

This Coastal Virginia native (*Eryngium aquaticum*) grows naturally in bogs, marshes, and other wet areas, but it can also grow in normal garden soil. The flowers start off a silvery white before turning blue or purple. They are not just showy to humans, butterflies, other insect pollinators, and birds like them too.

Firecracker Vine – Hummingbird Garden

While you are waiting for the tram, or for something from one of our food trucks, look on the purple arbor in the Hummingbird Garden. Right now, the firecracker vine (*Manettia cordifolia*) is in full bloom, attracting hummingbirds trying to get a few final meals in before flying to their winter homes. The red-orange flowers are the perfect color, and perfect shape to attract these busy little flyers.

Gaura – Baker Perennial Garden

This plant (*Oenothera lindheimeri*) is native to Texas and Louisiana, but thrives in local gardens. It blooms throughout the summer and early fall with little effort. Wispy clouds of white to sometimes pink blooms cover the stems. Frequent visitors at this time of year are a variety of bees, other insect pollinators, and hummingbirds.

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 into fall is their season to shine. Their flowers attract insect pollinators, and their ripe seeds offer many birds sustenance.

Jeana Phlox – Sensory Garden, Canal Walk, Border Garden

It can be difficult to find plants that excel at both garden performance and at providing ecological benefits, but Jeana phlox (*Phlox paniculata* 'Jeana') does so. Gardeners love it for its tall clusters of pink flowers that bloom from July to September on a nearly mildew proof plant. Hosts of butterflies and other pollinators flock to its flowers as well.

Goldenrod – Garden-wide

With their golden yellow flowers, goldenrod (*Solidago* species) is one of early fall's signature plants. It is also one of North America's most prolific wildflowers, with 80 different native species. There are goldenrods for just about every garden niche, from sun to shade, wet or dry, salty or not. They are also amazing beneficial insect attractors, and many birds will relish the ripe seeds.

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.

Butterfly House

In the NBG Butterfly House you can not only see a wide variety of native butterflies, but you can also see their caterpillars and chrysalises, learn which plants they like, and you can talk with knowledgeable volunteers and interns. You can also see why our butterfly house was voted the best in the country by readers of USA Today! See it while you can, it closes at the end of the month.

The Butterfly Maze – Butterfly Garden

Unlike other mazes made of corn or boxwood, ours is created using 'Northwind' switch grass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Northwind'). Right now, the grass is in full flower and the blades are taking on their fall color. It is a must-experience for kids or adults, especially on a breezy day when the grasses are dancing.

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 – One of North America's most widely spread birds is the great blue heron. Anywhere there is water, even well inland, they can be found. Ours like to patrol the canal bank waiting for breakfast to swim by.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture