Horticultural Highlights – Early November 2026

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.

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.

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 late 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.

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.

Roses – Margaret Moore Rose Garden
With summer behind us and with more moderate temperatures, many of the roses are enjoying a second wind. But get out there soon to enjoy the color, because this too shall pass.

Rugosa Rose – Butterfly Garden
This particular rose (*Rosa rugosa*) is one of the easiest to grow, perhaps a little too easy in some climates. Fortunately, it behaves here in Coastal Virginia. Right now, it is covered in beautiful red hips, extending the season of interest beyond the blooms. The fall foliage is late in dropping and is a rich golden yellow complimenting the hips nicely. Health tip – rose hips are extremely nutritious and are an especially rich source for vitamin C.

‘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 bide 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.

Purple Hyacinth Beans – Tram Stop 6
This annual (*Dolichos lablab*) is a beautiful vine with clusters of purple flowers, burgundy red stems, and purple seed pods. Inside the seed pods you will find clusters of black and white beans, like little sleeping panda cubs. This plant was grown by Thomas Jefferson at Monticello where it was considered an edible, but there are better beans for the table, especially since large quantities of this one are toxic! Better to admire than to ingest.

Winterberry Holly – Holly Garden, Discovery Grove
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.

Red Horsechestnut – Flowering Arboretum
This interesting tree (*Aesculus* x *carnea*) is a hybrid between our native red buckeye (*A. pavia*) and the European horsechestnut (*A. hippocastanum*). It typically deals with the stresses of a hot summer by going dormant early, but with the color weather we have been having, it now has new life. A few leaves are returning, as well as showy, deep pink flowers.

Salt Bush – Lake Whitehurst Shoreline, NATO Pond, and Garden-wide
Each fall, this underappreciated native shrub (*Baccharis halimifolia*) fills local shorelines with clouds of white flowers. It grows where few other plants survive, along the wet upper edges of salt marshes and other wetlands.

Olive Trees – NATO Hill, Discovery Peak in WOW
When you think of olive trees (*Olea europaea*) you might think about Italy, Spain, or Greece – not Coastal Virginia. However, there are a few cultivars that do well here if they are given excellent drainage. Not only are they evergreen, but they have a distinct color and habit, plus you can get fruit from them, which is now ripening on several of our trees.

Angel's Trumpet – Baker Overlook
These unusual and exotic plants (*Brugmansia*) are of South American origin, but are now considered extinct in the wild. Fortunately, humans have been cultivating them for a very long time. Traditionally they were grown for their medicinal and ritual uses, but used incorrectly they can be quite poisonous. Modern gardeners grow them for their beautiful, trumpet shaped flowers which always bloom late in the year in Coastal Virginia. Our climate is cold enough to kill the plant to the roots, but we are warm enough that they are able to regenerate in hot weather, and it takes months of heat for them to build enough energy to bloom, finally opening in November.

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.

Wildlife Watch – NBG is home to a number of pileated woodpeckers, North America's largest remaining woodpecker species. Colorful and loud, they are a real presence in the Garden. They forage for insects on the trunks of many large trees here. Yet one more reason to save trees.

Les Parks, Vice President of Horticulture