

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

July 22, 2024

“+” Denotes a Virginia Native Plant

Recent scorching weather, punctuated by wild thunderstorms, has stressed gardens of all sizes in the Richmond area. But luckily there are some vigorous bloomers that can shrug off the challenge. Bright yellow *Rudbeckia* of varying heights shout from every direction, suggesting that these are the golden days of summer, not the “dog days” signaled by the rise of Sirius, the dog star, above the horizon in our hemisphere. They are complemented by the lavender, purple and blue shades of equally sturdy plants, such as Joe Pye weed, that you might wish to add to your garden.



One of two towers at the entrance to the Four Seasons Garden

Flourish Towers. Beneath the brownish coconut fiber are a layer of soil and a soaking hose which nourish the surface plants. The airy fountain-like inflorescence of *Aechmea* ‘Yellow Berries’ emerges from a rosette of strappy chartreuse leaves. In contrast, the fleshy lavender-pink leaves of *Echeveria* ‘Afterglow’ resemble a rose. *Euphorbia* ‘Sticks on Fire’ has pencil-size stems with reddish-golden color in summer. Trailing *Tradescantia* ‘Purple Heart’ and *Cuphea* ‘Caribbean Sunset’ fill in spaces while large *Brugmansia* plants tower high in the sky.



A closeup of the varied and colorful tropical plants that are tucked into the towering planters.



Caladium ‘Frog in a Blender’ is planted along the Garden Walk West Side.

Caladiums are a beautiful solution for color in a shady garden. Grown for their bold and colorful foliage, the arrow-shaped leaves in shades of green mottled with white, pink or red, add a tropical look to the landscape. Equally at home in a container or planted directly in moist soil, these plants require part to full shade because too much sun will scald the foliage. Although hardy in USDA Zones 9-10, in colder Virginia the tubers should be dug and stored in peat or straw over the winter or treated as annual plants.



Caladium around the pedestal in Bragdon Memorial Garden now fully fill the space.



Throughout the Garden

Ornamental onion, *Allium* ‘Millenium’. This hybrid onion bulb, deliberately spelled with one ‘n’, has umbrels of green-turning-pink flowers held tall on individual scapes. A stunning plant for the edge of a border, this onion is a well-behaved clump-forming plant that won’t spread or self-seed if deadheaded. The slight onion fragrance deters deer and rabbits but won’t keep one from using the cut flowers indoors. **Upper Fountain Garden & throughout.**





Lagerstroemia 'Lipan' flanking the Fountain Garden as you approach the Conservatory.

Crape myrtle, *Lagerstroemia*, likes it HOT! Heat and drought-resistant, this southern garden favorite is a multi-stemmed upright deciduous tree that offers interest all year. Showy summer blooms resembling crepe paper in white, pink or lavender persist into fall. Blooms, berries and exfoliating bark provide three seasons of interest. Crape myrtles come in all sizes. Choose a cultivar that is right-sized for your garden so you won't have to resort to "crape murder" pruning that destroys the natural shape. **Throughout.**



The bark of *L. subcostata* var. *fuertei* 'Townhouse' on the North Terrace as you enter the Garden.



Closeup of a variety in the West Island Garden

+ **Joe Pye weed, *Eutrochium***. Domes of tiny pink lightly scented flowers bloom in large clusters attracting butterflies, bees and many pollinators that play an important role in supporting local ecosystems. It is deer resistant and works well in borders and naturalized areas. The Garden maintains more than ten varieties ranging from 3' to 7' high that can be grown in full sun to partial shade and moist soils. **Throughout.**



Joe Pye weed reflected in the pond below Asian Valley



H. paniculata 'Lee P1' White Wedding™ near Flagler Pavilion

Panicle hydrangea, *Hydrangea paniculata*, blooms on new woody growth and therefore appears now, late in the season. Pictured are a few in Flagler Garden. Look for other cultivars such as the small and pure white 'Ilvobo' Bobo® in Minor Garden and the large 'Interhydia' along the Garden Walk West Side. This species survives wide temperature ranges and is the most sun tolerant of the genus. Although not pH dependent for color, expect blooms to age to pink when in full sun. **Throughout.**



H. paniculata 'Limelight' in Flagler Garden



Hibiscus 'Inner Glow' near the Lotus Bridge.

+ **Hardy hibiscus, swamp rose mallow, *Hibiscus***. Late to break dormancy, these large plants with wide summer blossoms in whites, pinks and reds are worth the wait. Each bloom lasts only 1-2 days and yet the plant keeps producing all summer. They can reach 7' and can be grown to form hedges. Hibiscus flowers symbolize beauty and femininity, with purity also being attributed to the plants producing white blooms. **Throughout.**



Hibiscus 'Peppermint Schnapps' in Fountain Garden East



R. hirta 'Sonora' along the Main Garden Walk West Side

+ **Brown-eyed Susan, yellow coneflower, *Rudbeckia***. A hearty perennial with more than 15 species in the Garden, many of which are Virginia natives and some with green eyes. Low maintenance, quick growing, drought resistant, attractive to bees and birds and an abundant self-seeder - a perfect plant for beginning gardeners. Blooms profusely between June and October and makes wonderful cut flowers with a long vase life. **Throughout.**



Closeup of 'Sonora'