

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

September 23, 2024

+ Virginia Native Plant

We often think of spring as the time to plant flowers and vegetables, but fall is also an optimal planting season. The “thousand blooms” of spring here at the Garden are provided by bulbs planted in fall. While the leaves of our deciduous trees are slowly turning from green to shades of yellow, orange, and red the rains are arriving, adding moisture and cooling the soil, providing perfect conditions. If you want to create your own “million blooms” the variety of bulb colors and sizes are almost limitless. Depth of planting depends on the size of the bulb (tulips, 5”-7”; crocus 3”-4”); the rounded end faces down. Sometimes with very small bulbs distinguishing one end from the other is difficult. Rest assured that in most cases the growing tip will find its way out of the soil to deliver spring delight!



Close-up of *L. thunbergii* ‘Gibraltar’ at the base of Asian Valley

Bush clover, *Lespedeza thunbergii*, is a deciduous shrub with graceful, arching branches of soft blue-green foliage and delicate flowers – there is even a white form in Flagler Garden, near the Pavilion. It is a member of the pea family and, like other legumes, can fix its own nitrogen, enriching the surrounding soil. Blooms form on new wood so prune in late winter to maintain shape and control size. It’s deer resistant and can naturalize in the garden. Parking Lots A and B, Asian Valley Garden, and elsewhere around the Garden.



An extensive grove at the entrance to parking lot ‘A’



Tartarian aster, *Aster tataricus* ‘Jindai’ in the West Terrace

Asters. According to Greek legend, the goddess Astraea was so upset by the lack of stars in the sky that she began to weep, with asters sprouting from where her tears fell upon the ground. In Greek, aster means star. Sun-loving and drought resistant, often coloring the landscape where other blooms have given up for the season. Aster species (some native) serve as an excellent source for pollinators of all sizes. Once pollinated, the yellow pistil will darken which is a sign for the bees to not waste their time! Throughout.



Symphiotrichum oblongifolium ‘October Skies’ in the Meditation Garden showing the pistil colors



Solidago rugosa ‘Fireworks’ near the Medicinal Garden

+ **Goldenrod, *Solidago***, is a plant in the aster family with multiple species and cultivars that are loved by pollinators, migrating butterflies, and birds who eat the seeds – but not by deer or rabbits. Once used to treat burns (the roots) and fever (the flowers), it can grace the ornamental garden with its carefree nature and in its elegant habit. While Henry Ford unsuccessfully tried to use the rubber in the leaves to make tires, you can achieve immediate success in your garden with this gently spreading native plant. Throughout the Garden.



One of many stands of goldenrod around the Garden



In a container by the West Triangle bed in front of the Conservatory

Giant Elephant's Ear, *Colocasia gigantea* 'Thailand Giant Strain'. Even in a pot, these Asian plants can reach 4' to 7' tall, and as wide, with prodigious growth occurring in hot, humid summers. In tropical gardens, downward pointing ear-shaped leaves, with deep veins, are the star. But if you look at the base of these mature plants, you'll see blooms with a whitish leaf-like spathe that surrounds the tubular spadix, or reproductive structure. If pollinated, globular berries with several seeds are produced.



The emerging flowers



Closeup

Maximilian Sunflower, *Helianthus maximiliani*. Native to the Great Plains, this sunflower is named for Prince Maximilian who explored parts of the American West in the 1830s. The tall slender stems, which can reach 10', produce showy yellow blooms that are pollinated by bees, butterflies and beetles. These aggressive spreaders tolerate deer, drought and poor soils and are a major food source for wildlife as well as sheep and goats. Easily grown from seeds, these sunflowers will self-seed and naturalize.



A stand of outside the west wing of the Conservatory



Along the Main Garden Walk

+ Winterberry, *Ilex verticillate* 'Winter Gold' is a slow growing, woody, multi-stemmed shrub that thrives in wet boggy locations, making it an excellent choice for a damp thicket or rain garden. Hollies are dioecious, meaning separate male and female plants. One male can pollinate up to ten female shrubs, resulting in an abundance of golden berries from late summer through the winter. A good source of food for wildlife, *Ilex* is seldom damaged by deer. Asian Valley, Constructed Wetland around the lake.



One of several plants next to Sydnor Lake on Constructed Wetland



+ Obedient plant, *Physostegia virginiana* 'Vivid'. The bright pinkish lavender flowers of this cultivar are indeed 'Vivid.' The common name derives from its willingness to briefly retain its position when the flower is bent to one side. These long-lived flowers, which are good for cutting, provide nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. Plants prefer moist, acidic, well-drained soil, although they will tolerate clay soil. An added benefit - it is deer resistant. At the base of Asian Valley.



Rose, *Rosa* 'Horcogjil' At Last®. Striking, deep apricot-orange double flowers fade to a light pink. A sweetly perfumed, long-blooming, disease-resistant rose that is compact, dense and mounding with glossy, disease-resistant leaves. Blooms continuously from late spring through frost. This grows 2.5 to 3' tall and wide. Grow as a specimen or in small groups in borders, cottage gardens, foundations or rose gardens. Also effective as a hedge. Louise Cochran Rose Garden, located in bed RG1.

