

# BRIGHT SPOTS

## CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

November 21, 2022 – Final Edition for the Year

### + Virginia Native Plant

Have you tired of raking, shredding and bagging leaves? Perhaps it's time to add a few evergreens to your landscape. *Camellia sasanqua*, a broadleaf evergreen, is still blooming despite the freezing weather. But there is also a wide variety of non-blooming conifers that stand out once the temperature drops. It is easier to note the shape, size and wide range of green to golden hues available in the Garden's collections now that the colorful flowers of the herbaceous perennials are finished for the season. Come visit and take a close look at the evergreen broadleaf shrubs and conifers throughout. Many cultivars have variegated gold or silver foliage that enliven shady areas.



**Variegated boxwood, *Buxus sempervirens* 'Aureo-variegata'**. Enhancing the formal entrance to the Garden, there are 16 identical boxwoods strategically placed in the **Robins Visitor Center North Terrace** and the adjacent **Four Seasons Garden**. These pyramid-shaped shrubs have dark-green leaves that are edged in creamy-yellow, giving the overall effect of luminescent light-green. Their solid evergreen presence ground us as we enter the otherwise ever-changing landscape of our Garden. While requiring some insect control, boxwoods have been long prized for their classic shape and handsome foliage.



**Rosemary, *Salvia rosmarinus* (syn. *Rosmarinus officinalis*)** is a bushy evergreen shrub with intensely fragrant, needle-like leaves and purple-blue flowers that bloom in spring – a welcome treat for early pollinating bees. A Mediterranean native, rosemary will thrive in full sun locations with good drainage. *Officinalis* means “sold in stores”, denoting a useful plant. Rosemary flowers and leaves are harvested for culinary flavoring, sachets and toiletries. Winner of the Royal Horticulture Society Award of Garden Merit. **Healing Garden.**



**Grasses.** Previously, grasses were associated with lawns, pastures and cereal grains. Now they provide texture and interest to a garden almost year-round. In sun or rain, the nativar white muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris* 'White Cloud') is a firecracker of light as its long inflorescences sway in the wind. Cut back these warm season grasses in the spring after enjoying their plumes in winter. **Fountain Garden and Four Seasons Garden.**





**Hinoki cypress, *Chamaecyparis obtusae*.** There are dozens of hinoki cypress conifers around the Garden. Distinguished by their elegant twists of branchlets, the leaves are rich-green, bright-yellow or sun-kissed like this cultivar in the **Central Garden**. And you can see why, the common name of hinoki means “fire tree” in Japan. Grow this Japanese evergreen as an accent plant or as a hedge in sun/part shade and fertile soil - and see how it lightens the winter landscape.



**Pineapple, *Ananas comosus*.** Inside the dome of the **Conservatory** is this member of the bromeliad family native to Brazil. First seen by Columbus in 1493, the pineapple was distributed around the world by tall sailing ships. Greenhouses later allowed pineapples to be grown throughout Europe. To grow your own pineapple, remove the leafy crown and plant the crown in moist potting soil. Keep the temperature above 60 degrees and be patient!



**Euphorbia**, commonly known as spurge, is one of the largest plant families with about 7,500 species from the ubiquitous Christmas poinsettia to the evergreen *E. characias* ‘Glacier Blue’ (left, **Central Garden**). Numerous cactus-like spurges can be found in the west wing of the **Conservatory**. The common thread among all these plants is their milky sap which is a skin irritant for some people and acts as a deterrent to grazing animals. The red leaves of the poinsettia are called bracts; the tiny yellow flowers are in the center of the plant.



**Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum*.** These graceful trees are valued for their diversity of plant habit, leaf color and shape. Smaller varieties are a popular choice for bonsai enthusiasts. An understory tree in their native range, they are shade tolerant and some, such as a species plant pictured here, retain their colorful leaves well into the fall season. Once the distraction of the leaves has passed, we can appreciate the architectural shape of the trees’ limbs. **Asian Valley**.



**+Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*,** is a native deciduous shrub that produces a crop of brightly colored red, orange or pale-yellow berries that will persist into winter (hence the common name) and provide food for our feathered friends. Verticillata is Latin for “whorled” and refers to the arrangement of the berries around the stems. A large stunning specimen of the cultivar ‘Winter Red’ is located in the **West Island Garden**. The plant is dioecious, meaning both male and female plants are needed to produce berries.

