

# BRIGHT SPOTS

## CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

November 13, 2023

“+” Denotes a Virginia Native Plant

Even though the temperature is dropping the Garden is still a riot of color as the trees start their change from green to orange, yellow and scarlet. If you are thinking of adding a tree to your grounds this is the time to survey the wide range of autumn leaf color. It will enable you to identify candidates that will enhance, not clash, with existing plants and hardscape. As the leaves fall, the architecture of the tree is revealed, allowing you to identify possibilities for different size spaces. If your space is narrow, look for branching that is more vertical (fastigate). Be sure to notice mature height. Our native *Magnolia grandiflora* can reach 80’ at maturity.



*F. gardenii* ‘Suzanne’ along the Cherry Tree Walk

**+Fothergilla.** Originally discovered in South Carolina, two natives occur in the southeastern states. Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*), which grows to 3’, favors sandy moist areas. Witch-alder (*F. major*), occurs in more mountainous areas and can reach 10’. In spring, the nectar in honey-scented bushy white flowers attracts bees. The summer blue-green, ridged leaves are handsome. And now, the shapely leaves turn memorable and long-lasting colors. Little upkeep and no diseases, deer, rabbits or other pests! **Bragdon Memorial Garden, Healing Garden and throughout.**



Insect view of *F. gardenii* ‘Suzanne’



Close-up of +*Cornus sericea* ‘Bailey’ in Fountain Garden

**+Dogwood, *Cornus*.** Various native and non-native shrub dogwood species shed their leaves in autumn to reveal brilliantly colored stems of yellow, coral or red. The Garden hosts several examples, the most visible now being the red twig dogwoods. Prune out a third of the older stems of these suckering shrubs late each winter to stimulate new growth, guaranteeing vibrant color the following winter season. Easily rooted in moist soil, plant any one of these varieties in front of evergreens for a stunning contrast in color and texture. **Central Gardens.**



*Cornus alba* ‘Elegantissima’ in 4-Seasons Garden



Terrace Garden West

**+Muhly grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris* ‘White Cloud’** is a firecracker of light as its long inflorescences sway in the wind and reflect the sun. A native perennial & ornamental grass, this sure winner serves nature well as birds & small animals eat the seed and find shelter under the blades. Insects, diseases, deer and city pollution don’t bother it. It is long-lived even in poor soil, heat & drought if planted in full sun. 3’-4’. **East and West Upper Fountain Gardens.**



Muhly grass up close





Scene in Flagler Garden

**Asian maple, *Acer palmatum*.** One of the most prized landscape plants in the Garden, this species of maple is valued for the diversity of plant habit (upright, weeping or multi-trunked) leaf color and tree size. Miniature varieties of these trees are a popular choice for bonsai enthusiasts. The autumn leaves are brilliantly colored and some of them have a distinctive showy bark - extending their appeal of color and contrast to winter landscapes. **Asian Valley, Flagler Garden, and throughout.**



***Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Cv.'** in Asian Valley



Cherry Tree Walk – male cones

**Atlas cedar, *Cedrus libani* subsp. *atlantica* 'Glauca'** is native to the Atlas Mountains in North Africa. The short needles are arranged in small clusters maturing to blue-green. An ancient species, it is a true cedar that tolerates drought, heat and humidity while reaching 60' in height and may live for 1,000 years. Wind pollinated, smaller finger-like male cones appear in October while large, barrel shaped female cones take over a year to fully mature and are striking in appearance year-round.



Cherry Tree Walk – female cones



Along west side of Cherry Tree Walk

**+Bald cypress, *Taxodium distichum*.** Not all conifers are evergreens. As the soft needles on this deciduous conifer turn from green to glorious bronze, they drop to the ground, hence 'bald'. Look for clusters of cones the color of oxidized copper. These trees can grow to 100' and may develop distinctive "knees", hollow conical structures that are extensions of the roots. Native Americans repurposed these knees as bee hives. **West Island Garden and Cherry Tree Walk**



By Lotus Bridge on Cherry Tree Walk



Distinctive leaf shape

**Maidenhair tree, *Ginkgo biloba*.** The unique fan-shaped leaves gleam golden as a group of 6 male trees ("Magyar") stand tall and thin as sentinels along the stream; their upright (fastigate) habit make them an ideal street tree. Contrast their shape and size to the legacy female tree in Grace Arents Garden. Native to China, the *Ginkgo* dates back 270 million years, surviving the Ice Age and dinosaurs. The trees are female or male (dioecious). The fleshy fruit of the female produces an unpleasant odor if left to ferment on the ground.



Female *Ginkgo biloba* in Grace Arents' Garden



***C. sasanqua* 'Setsugekka'** in Lucy Payne Minor Garden

***Camellia sasanqua*.** Camellias have been cultivated for thousands of years in China and are a symbol of love and devotion. They often appear in Chinese art, literature, and poetry, to represent beauty, purity, and faithfulness. *C. sasanqua* "Setsugekka" blooms well into December with fragrant white, ruffled flowers that attract bees. While it naturally grows full and bushy, it can be trained as an espalier or on to a trellis. **Throughout.**



Flower of 'Setsugekka'