

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

January 15, 2024

“+” Denotes a Virginia Native Plant

If “jingle bells” has left you with jangled nerves, come take a quiet walk in the winter garden. The evergreens, in a wide variety of shades, will help restore you to a sense of balance, harmony and peace. Even when the temperature drops and the sky turns gray, the plants detailed below (& many more not listed) will brighten your day. As an added benefit, the oxygen they disperse will invigorate. If you’d like to add one to your garden, now is the time to evaluate size, shape & color without the distraction of multicolored perennials.



Robins Visitors Center Front

Arizona cypress, *Cupressus arizonica* var. *glabra* ‘Blue Ice’, is an exceptionally attractive evergreen with silver blue, frosty foliage. One of the most interesting characteristics is its flaking and scaly bark and its classic shape. This tree has both male and female cones, scientifically known as a monoecious tree. The male cones appear in spring, and the female cones in fall. It is slow growing and will tolerate extreme heat and drought. It is native to Arizona and is a great addition to the winter garden with its beautiful foliage, bark and stature.



Close-up of needle-like foliage



The leaves up close

Variegated boxwood, *Buxus sempervirens* ‘Aureo-variegata’. Enhancing the formal entrance to the Garden, there are 12 identical boxwoods strategically placed in and outside of the Robins Visitors Center North Terrace. 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.



Robins Visitor Center North Terrace



Ilex x ‘Virginia’ in Bragdon Memorial Garden

Holly *Ilex*. The Garden has more than 90 hollies including natives. English holly (*I. aquifolium* ‘Argentea Marginata’) features shiny red berries and variegated leaves. Use winter pruning to train it as an evergreen shrub. (right photo) In 2000, Virginia holly (*Ilex* x ‘Virginia’) was introduced at the Garden in cooperation with the National Arboretum. Heavy red berries cover this massive pyramidal evergreen (up to 35’ x 15’). Dark-green glossy leaves, with few spines, make it a perfect screening evergreen.



English holly outside the Robins Visitor Center North Terrace



Fountain Garden Triangle West

Small anise tree, *Illicium parviflorum* ‘Florida Sunshine’. Smaller than the species and growing to about 7’, this cultivar’s chartreuse leaves turn yellow, and its stems become red in the fall, making it a standout at this time of the year. Plant this evergreen shrub in partial shade to keep the leaves from getting sunburned and in moist organic soil to keep the roots cool and damp. The foliage smells like anise when brushed or crushed. Related to the Florida native, this anise tree is pollinated by small native flies.



Fountain Garden Triangle West



Flagler Garden near the original Garden entrance

Winter heath, *Erica carnea*, ‘Springwood Pink’. The name (erica) comes from the Greek word ‘to break’ as this low-growing evergreen shrub breaks its pink blossoms in late winter. It grows best in sun and well-drained loamy soil and pairs well with purple violas. Although cold-hardy and perfect for cool season containers, humid summers may lead to powdery mildew & poor drainage can cause root rot. Deer, insects and diseases ignore winter heath, while bees are attracted to its nectar.



Flagler Garden



Flagler Garden

Needle palm, *Rhapidophyllum hystrix*, is an evergreen, clumping fan palm characterized by long, sharp needles along the trunk. One of the toughest cold-hardy palms, it can survive Virginia’s winters and frozen precipitation. Native to the wet bottomlands of the SE US, these plants often form massive clumps which are almost impenetrable to wildlife. Slow growing needle palms are highly adaptable to varying soils and sunlight and can provide a tropical feel to porches, patios and gardens. No serious diseases or insects.



Close-up photo



Seen throughout the Garden

Oregon grape, *Mahonia*. Shrubs with all season interest are bright spots in any garden. But mahonia can be invasive outside of its native north Pacific ecosystem. Invasives often grow aggressively, outcompete natives, decrease diversity and negatively impact wildlife. Sadly, many are still sold, so it’s a good idea to check a reputable database like invasivespeciesinfo.gov Native sweetshrub, inkberry or American beautyberry can be good substitutes.



Mahonia ‘Arthur Menzies’ along Joan Van Arnam Walk in Flagler Garden



Margaret Streb Conifer Garden

Colorado spruce, *Picea pungens* ‘Thomsen’ adds a splash of color and texture to your landscape. This beautiful specimen has green to powder blue needle color. Fast growing with exceptionally thick needles, it is native to the Central Rocky Mountains. Easily grown in average, acidic, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun. Tolerates some light shade Hardiness zone 2 to 7. An excellent evergreen for lawns.



Up close

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