

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

March 25, 2024

“+” Denotes a Virginia Native Plant

Despite the drenching downpour and winds of late March, the ornamental cherry (and plum, and crabapple) trees are blooming in glorious splendor around Sydnor Lake and elsewhere in the Garden. Avoid the crowds and bustle surrounding the iconic ornamental cherries on the Washington, DC mall. No need to set out on I-95 when you can park with ease and take a tranquil stroll down the Main Garden Walk to view these traditional harbingers of spring. And then of course, there are other delightful spring plantings to view as well (see below). Ornamental *Prunus* do set fruit, but it is insignificant in size and very tart. These fruits do provide food for birds however, so if you have a location for a small, decorative tree you might consider adding one to your garden.



Lily-flowered tulip ‘Blushing Lady’ in the Four-Seasons Garden

Tulips, *Tulipa*. Native to Eurasian highlands, and cultivated in Iran since the 10th C, tulips were introduced to northern Europe in the 16th C where tulip mania created a “boom and bust” bulb market. Tulips prefer long cool springs and dry summers which are not typical of Richmond, where they are generally treated as annuals. Tulips are divided into 15 categories based upon size, time of bloom and flower characteristics, e.g., cup, goblet, bowl, fringed, lily-flowered and doubles. Plant tulip bulbs in early fall in well-drained soil.



Vidal™ tulips around the Fountain Garden



Along the elevated path in West Island

+Allegheny serviceberry, *Amelanchier laevis*, can grow as a small understory tree or multi-trunked shrub, often naturalized at the edge of a woodland. Showy clusters of white, fragrant flowers are among the first blooms in spring, followed by small, tasty fruits that resemble blueberries, edible by both songbirds and humans. Fall brings brilliant orange-red foliage. Largely pest and disease free, this lovely native tree is an excellent replacement for the invasive Bradford pear.



A close-up of the emerging flower



Close-up of pearl bush

Pearlbush, *Exochorda* × *macrantha* ‘Blizzard’ Snow Day® is a cultivar of the *Exochorda* genus that shares traits of heat and drought tolerance, compact size and larger blooms. The buds resemble pearls before opening to multiple five petal blooms in spring. This cultivar can be pruned to remain a small shrub or trained as a tree. Be sure to prune just after blooming, as it blooms on the previous year’s growth. It prefers well drained soil and sun-part sun.



Exochorda x *macrantha* ‘Blizzard’ Snow Day® in Meditation G.



Acer palmatum 'Katsura'

Japanese maple, *Acer*, really are Bright Spots. These small, deciduous trees thrive in dappled shade in our hot climate. Early in spring, tiny reddish flowers, carried in umbrels, shine against emerging lime green leaves. *A.* 'Viridis', near the Tea House, has finely cut, almost lace-like leaves and weeping form. Other varieties with foliage from green to bronze are throughout the Garden and their fall color is equally stunning. Small cultivars are prized as bonsai and often grown in containers.



Flower of full moon maple, *Acer japonicum* 'Aconitifolium'



In Flagler Garden near the Monet Bridge

+ **Celandine poppy, *Stylophorum diphyllum***, is native to eastern US and grows best in shady, moist soil. The bright yellow flowers sit atop long stems (filled with yellow sap that makes a good dye) and attract bees. If you'd like a cheery welcome to spring in your woodland or rain garden, this small perennial gently naturalizes by self-seeding and has no bothering insect or disease issues. NOT to be confused with the invasive "greater" or "lesser" celandines, both born of different genuses.



Up close



In stages of unfurling

+ **Cinnamon fern, *Osmundastrum cinnamomeum***. These native ferns require moist rich soils and partial to full shade with dappled sunlight. In early spring, new uncoiling fronds – known as fiddleheads – emerge from underground stems. Mature vase-shaped clumps of large blue-green sterile fronds often reach 3'. In the center is a reproductive plume-like cinnamon-colored frond. Good companion plants are iris, hosta and perennial lobelia.



Woodland Walk in Flagler Garden



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Jack in the pulpit, *Arisaema triphyllum*, is a native, woodland spring ephemeral. The bloom is a hooded flower containing a spadix (jack) that appears to stand inside the spathe (pulpit) like a preacher might stand in the pulpit, hence the common name. The plant emerges from the ground with fully formed leaves, with the leaves rolled and folded. After blooming, it disappears until a cluster of bright red berries appear in late summer, that are enjoyed by birds and mammals.



Close up



Grace Arents Garden around Bloemendaal House was developed by Miss Grace during the 1920s and restored by The Garden Club of Virginia in 1990. The design of the original beds and walkways remain intact. The gazebo, arbors and garden beds in this popular wedding venue are reproductions of those in the original garden. The towering Ginkgo tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) and the *Magnolia grandiflora* are heritage trees from the beginning days of this lovely space.

