

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

April 8, 2024

“+” Denotes a Virginia Native Plant

April has traditionally brought a parade in celebration of azaleas to Richmond (this year it was Saturday, April 6th), and certainly they are a traditional landscape favorite in local gardens and as foundation plantings. However, there are any number of other delightful spring blooming shrubs that are just as festive while also providing heady fragrances and food for our local pollinators. (Note Fothergilla and Viburnum, both native to the U. S., below.) Along with our traditional tulip and daffodil displays, most of the hollies in the Central Garden area are also currently in full bloom. Their tiny and inconspicuous flowers are abuzz with honeybees. You can just hear the Garden springing to life all around you. Don't miss it!



Lady Banks rose, *Rosa banksiae*, is a vigorous, thornless climbing rose that is the first to bloom in spring. A miniature rose, double, yellow rose, it was named for the wife of Sir Joseph Banks – one of the founders of the UK's Royal Horticultural Society. Achieving its Award of Garden Merit prize, this rose proves its excellence by also being disease and pest resistant. Grow this aggressive climber over a wall or pergola and maybe your specimen will top the one in Tombstone, AZ that covers over 8000 sq ft! That is another story. **4 Seasons & Grace Arents**



On the wall in Four Seasons Garden



Fothergilla gardenia in the Meditation Garden

+Bottlebrush plant, *Fothergilla gardenia* and other species can be found around the Garden. A valuable native shrub, it now is in bloom – with nary a petal, the “brush” flowers are composed only of aromatic stamens above with the female stigmas below. It is pollinated by bees & wind and is free from serious pests or diseases. The shrub's blue-green, veined leaves are most attractive all summer and turn vibrant colors in the fall. Full sun is best for flower display and fall color; afternoon shade is best for all-around health.



The flower – see the bee?



Light yellow tulips paired with late blooming daffodils in Bragdon Memorial 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, with soil temperatures below 70°F. Richmond's soil registered 88°F last summer, so here they are more successful if 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 the bulbs in early fall in well-drained soil.



Darwin hybrid tulips 'Ivory Floradale' in the Triangle Gardens



Deutzia crenata 'Nikko' in Asian Valley

Deutzia, Deutzia gracilis, is a lovely early blooming shrub for sun or shade. Racemes of tiny white bell-shaped flowers are dotted along arching stems. *D. 'Nikko'*, a compact form with dark green leaves and burgundy fall color, edges the pathway near the Tea House. *D. Chardonnay Pearls®* with its electric chartreuse leaves lights up a nook at the start of the Joan Van Arnam Walk. Low maintenance and drought tolerant once established, it's a spring Bright Spot.



Slender deutzia, *Deutzia gracilis* 'Duncan' Chardonnay Pearls® in Flagler Garden



Fragrant viburnum in Flagler Garden. Can you spot the cardinal

+**Viburnum**. We have 61 of these shrubs around the Garden. Some are native (*V. nudum* – possumhaw - in Morton, among others), some are show-stopping (*V. macrocephalum* - Chinese snowball - along parking lot A), some are fragrant (*V. × carlcephalum* - fragrant viburnum - in Flagler), and all are gorgeous. With their blooming season staggered over more than a month, this fairly care-free shrub will attract your eye as well as those of birds, butterflies, native bees, and moths.



Judd viburnum in the Margaret Streb Garden



The new (blue) flowers and the pollinated (pink) flowers

+**Virginia bluebell, Mertensia virginica**, is a native ephemeral wildflower that thrives in moist, rich woodland soil in part to full shade. Spreading clumps will form a charming colony over time. Flowers begin with pink buds that mature to cornflower blue trumpets, & revert to pink after pollination. As the plants go dormant and the foliage dies to the ground in mid-summer, bluebells are often paired with other shade lovers (like ferns, hostas or astilbes) to complete the summer garden.



Along the Joan Van Arnam Walk in Flagler Garden & throughout



Along the Joan Van Arnam Walk in Flagler Garden

+**Piedmont azalea, Rhododendron canescens**, is a striking native species. The fragrant flowers are 1 to 1.5” across and come in shades of pink to white. Although considered a southern species, this is a hardy shrub that deserves wider landscape use. The 4-5’ plant makes a spectacular spring show as the flowers open before, and after, the leaves have expanded. It is a nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds, its fragrant blossoms are great for cutting, the leaves turn rusty red in fall, & it is drought tolerant if mulched.



Up close



Woodland Walk in Flagler Garden

+**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. After blooming, it disappears until the cluster of bright red berries are enjoyed by birds and mammals in late summer.



Look under those big leaves for the flower

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