

BRIGHT SPOTS

CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

February 24, 2025

+ Virginia Native Plant

If you have carefully left the stalks of last year's perennials uncut to shelter insects over the winter your garden is now looking a bit like mine – unkempt! On an unseasonably warm sunny day, it is tempting to get out the pruners and rakes to start tidying. A bit of restraint is advisable, however. The Richmond area can still experience frost through late-March to early-April. Gardening experts note that frost can form even above the freezing mark if there is a brisk wind. So, try to leave some stems and leaves to shelter our little critters for a few more weeks. And, if you don't have any late winter bloomers, you might want to consider adding one or more of the plants described below.



Along the Fountain Garden overlooking the fountain

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 West**



Closeup of the anise tree



Closeup of a chocolate pod that has ripened from green to yellow

Chocolate tree, *Theobroma cacao*. Now in full fruit, this small evergreen tree (in USDA Zones 11-12), a native of the Amazon rainforest, has numerous football-shaped cacao pods that are in the process of ripening. These pods, which turn from green to yellowish orange, contain up to 60 beans (seeds) in a pulpy substance. Removed seeds are fermented, dried, husked and then refined into various types of chocolate. Archaeological evidence shows that cacao was used more than 5,000 years ago in Mesoamerica. **Conservatory – East Wing**



The tree with both young (green) and maturing (yellow) pods
Come see before the Conservatory closes in April



Hamamelis x intermedia 'Arnold Promise'

These two cultivars of witch hazel trees, ***Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Arnold Promise'** and **'Diane'** pop out of the winter landscape along the lawn in Flagler Garden. The deciduous small trees now begin the year with very fragrant fringe blooms, the first yellow and the second red. In autumn, the foliage of 'Arnold Promise' turns orange/yellow and of 'Diane' turns reddish copper. Best grown in sun (brighter flowers) or part shade and in rich & moist soil. **Flagler Garden**



Hama x melis x intermedia 'Diane'



Closeup of the buds before opening and releasing fragrance

Winter daphne, *Daphne odora*, named after Daphne, a nymph who was transformed into a plant to escape Apollo's unwanted advances. An evergreen shrub with glossy leaves and clusters of showy pink, lavender or white flowers that perfume the crisp winter air with an irresistible floral scent, blooming from mid to late winter. Located next to the bench in Dot's Garden, take a stroll to the Woodland Walk to enjoy this early blooming harbinger of spring. **Flagler Garden (Dot's Garden)**



Next to the arbor in Dot's Garden



Along the Woodland Walk in Flagler Garden

Hellebores, *Helleborus*. Depending on the species, hellebores have different common names such as Christmas rose, Lenten rose and stinking hellebore. The cupped flowers open above the leaves and grow in many soft colors. Now increasing in colorful blooms, they are long lasting on the plant and in arrangements. Plant in partial shade and fertile soil for years of enjoyment. Hellebores are unattractive to deer, rabbits and snails. **Asian Valley and Flagler Garden**



And more!



We brought the nodding flower to an up facing position so you can see the delicate markings

Snowdrops, *Galanthus nivalis*, are hardy perennial bulbs sporting white bell-shaped flowers with green streaks in early spring. They are adapted for the cold, with leaf tips able to penetrate frozen soil and to prevent icing. Snowdrops grow in moist, organically rich soil, in partial shade and do well in woodland settings and under deciduous trees where they often naturalize to form large colonies. **Flagler Garden**



A group of spreading snowdrops in the Woodland Walk



A lavender crocus pairs with a bench along the side of the Grace Arents Garden

Crocus, *Crocus tommasinianus*, known as a celebration and harbinger of spring, is a member of the Lily family. The flowers, that come in many colors, symbolize cheerfulness, joy, hope and rebirth. The ancient Romans so loved the scent that they processed it into a spray to use on guests as they arrived at galas! The fragrance of the flower also is believed to inspire love as it bloomed at midnight on Valentine's Day. **Throughout**



Spring is coming



One view of the spruce "llama" as you walk along the path

Serbian spruce, *Picea omorika*, 'Pendula Bruns' is a narrow evergreen tree with weeping branches that cascade down close to the trunk. In 10 years, it can grow 6 - 8' tall and 2' wide in a sunny location. Known for its unusual structure, it can easily be the focal point of any garden or a striking accent in a mixed border or container. Resembling a furry llama, 'Pendula Bruns' is on full display in the Streb Garden. **Margaret Streb Conifer Garden**



And another view when looking the other way