

# BRIGHT SPOTS

## CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

May 26, 2025

**LEWIS  
GINTER**  
BOTANICAL  
GARDEN

### + Virginia Native Plant

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The Thrive expansion project has temporarily closed the Conservatory but that doesn't mean you have to miss out on experiencing some of its wonderful plants. Dozens of our favorites have escaped the confines of the glass house and are spread throughout the Garden. Start your visit in the North Terrace and look at the tall tree ferns, *Sphaeropteris cooperii*, that look like something out of Jurassic Park! Pencil cacti, *Euphorbia tirucalli*, add a vertical element to the composition around the Lower Fountain. Finally, as you leave, check out the dramatic *Bromeliads* that dot the parking lots. Our new, larger Conservatory is scheduled to open Spring, 2026.



A view of the goth planting in the Bragdon Garden, offset by the white azaleas by the KEC

Goth gardens feature nature's dark plants by creating a mysterious and enchanting aesthetic! ZZ plant, Raven™ 'Dowon' (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*) towers over rattlesnake plant (*Goeppertia insignis*) as sweet potato vine, Sweet Caroline Raven™ (*Ipomoea batatas*) crawls through the bed. Dwarf banana (*Musa acuminata*) 'Colla' peeps in as elephant's ear (*Colocasia esculents* (L.) Schott) and coleus 'Dark Star' (*Plectranthus scutellarioides*) loom large and emerge in the beauty of darkness! Be mystified in the Bragdon Memorial Garden.



A view looking back towards the Four Seasons Garden



A young plant growing in the Fountain Garden West

**Dragon bones, *Euphorbia lactea* 'White Ghost'**, has a candelabra shape, spines and a white surface mottled with green tissue, which is where photosynthesis occurs. Although it resembles a cactus, it actually belongs to the spurge family, whose members produce a thick poisonous sap. Research carefully before deciding to cultivate it. This creative mix of a spectral spurge from the Conservatory and brilliant summer blooms challenges us to explore unusual plant combinations.



Close-up of dragon bones



*Spiraea japonica* 'Anthony Waterer' at the Conservatory Front Slope West & East

***Spiraea***. We could showcase spiraeas from mid-March through the summer, as various species and innumerable cultivars display their flat-topped "corymbs" of tiny flowers for months. While the flowers typically are pink, the leaves vary in colors as seen in these photos. The deciduous plants thrive in any well-drained soil and have 3-season interest as the leaves turn color. The name comes from Greek, referring to the spiral of flowers. Attractive to butterflies & a symbol of success.



*Spiraea* 'NCSX1' Double Play® Cancy Corn® at the Robins Visitor Center Rear





*H. serrata* 'Blue Billow' softly dominates in Asian Valley

**Mountain hydrangea, *Hydrangea serrata***, is native to the moist mountain valleys in Japan. It prefers cool growing conditions in open shade; shrubs in warmer climates benefit from deeper shade. Their compact habit requires little pruning, but any trimming should be done immediately after flowering as blooms form on old wood. Delicate clusters of blooms (pink in base soil; blue in acidic soil) can last for several weeks. These two are the lace cap varieties.



You can't miss *H. serrata* 'Bluebird' in Lucy Payne Minor Garden



*Penstemon digitalis* 'Blackbeard' in the Fountain Garden East

**+Beardtongue, *Penstemon***. Showy white to pastel pink flowers float high above their lower leaf clusters. Enjoy watching bees, butterflies and hummingbirds visit the tubular flowers that provide critical spring pollen and nectar resources. To treat toothaches, Native Americans chewed the root pulp and placed it in tooth cavities to relieve pain. The term beardtongue comes from a hairy protrusion inside the lower lip of the flower that increases the efficiency of flower pollination.



Closeup of *P. digitalis* 'Midnight Masquerade' in the Fountain Garden East



A beautiful apricot-colored plant on the south side of West Island

**+Pitcher plants, *Sarracenia***. Originally, 8 species occurred in the US and Canada, with 7 in the SE Coastal Plain where boggy acidic-rich soils with low nitrogen prevailed. Hence, the leaves were modified into a tube, topped with a hood that enabled insects to be trapped and digested to provide nitrates. Less than 5% of native habitat remains; the Meadowview Biological Research Station (1995) focuses on restoring VA natives, *S. flava* and *S. purpurea*, and their hybrids.



*Sarracenia leucophylla* located around the West Island Garden



The blue spruce complimented by the blue hydrangea in the Streb Conifer Garden

A landscaping match of color perfection: the combination of the Colorado spruce (foreground) with the hydrangea (background) creates a visually striking composition. The new spring growth on the Colorado spruce appears as a vibrant blue color against the backdrop of the darker, older blue needles and is complimented by the vivid blue mophead flowers of the *H. macrophylla* 'All Summer Beauty'. Visit the Streb Conifer Garden to see all the evergreens' colorful, fresh new growth.



A closeup of the emerging spring growth on the *Picea pungens* 'Thomsen'



At 100-petals, these blooms contain the most of any rose

***Rosa* 'Aussaucer' David Austin® Evelyn®** is an English shrub rose developed by rosarian David Austin in 1991. His fame was his crossing of Old Roses with Modern Roses to bring out better plant health, repeat blooming, and especially fragrance. This one is named for Mass.-based Crabtree & Evelyn because of their use of roses in perfumes and lotions. "AUS" refers to Austin's breeding and "saucer" refers to the shape of the huge 100-petal blooms. Smell the apricots and peaches!



Gracing the base of the lawn from the Conservatory (RG9) & other locations in the Rose Garden