

BRIGHT SPOTS

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF CURRENT GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

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+ Virginia Native Plant

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It's a common misconception that there's nothing to see during this fallow season in the Garden. Quite the contrary!! In this quiet time so much of the structure and texture of the Garden shines. Take notice of the color and grain of tree bark; compare the white branches of the legacy sycamore towering over Lake Sydnor with the cinnamon bark of the 'Natchez' crape myrtles in Flagler. Berries like winterberry 'Winter's Red' and the red or yellow berries of the American hollies cling to stems and feed birds and other critters. Buds emerging in the winter sun offer hopeful glimpses of spring to come. Look at what we noticed this week.

The shrub nicely fills a corner in



4-Seasons. The yellow racemes of flowers will develop purple berries

Oregon grape, *Mahonia × media*

'Underway' is an evergreen shrub known for all season interest. In winter, it has fragrant, lemon-yellow flower spikes and holly-like foliage that offers wildlife appeal to bees and birds. Thriving in part to full shade gardens, it grows to about 6-8 feet tall and wide. It is a non-native and can be invasive and may outcompete native plants. Sweetshrub, inkberry and American beautyberry are native substitutes that also have all season interest!



Different parts of the Oregon grape were used to make jam, yellow dye, and medicinal tonics



In Asian Valley, the berries peek out of the leaves, making the perfect house-warming gift in Japan

Sacred lily, *Rohdea japonica*. Year-round, this vase-shaped plant makes an excellent groundcover in shady areas with well-drained rich soil. Dark-green narrow leaves grow in clumps up to 2' tall. Although the flowers are inconspicuous, clumps of bright-red berries add winter interest. Generally, wildlife avoid the leaves and berries. In Chinese, *Rohdea* translates as "10,000 years green" and symbolizes multiplying good fortune. Prized in Japan, there are more than 500 cultivars.



Graceful drifts of the sacred lily are lovely under trees, in rock gardens, and even in pots



Buds on the *Edgeworthia chrysanthia* 'Nanjing Gold' in Asian Valley are about to open

Buds. The recent warm days of Richmond's "false spring" have awakened some of our early bloomers. They are a welcome sight for the winter weary but, more importantly, are a lifeline for early rising pollinators. As these tight buds open on bare branches, their bright flower colors and strong fragrances draw bees and other insects to the pollen and nectar essential to their survival. Adding plants like these to your garden helps create a robust healthy ecosystem.



... as are the buds on maule's quince, also in Asian Valley

 <p>On a warm winter's day, the flower petals stretch out in the sunlight; at night they roll up</p>	<p>Witch hazel, <i>Hamamelis x intermedia</i> 'Arnold Promise', is a hybrid of 2 Asian species with the best characteristics of each: showy, fragrant, hardy, tall. Introduced by Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, this cultivar's colorful flowers bloom at the same time that last year's fruit develops – right now! The spidery petals curl up during a cold night and then unfurl for the pollinating gnats & bees during the day.</p>	 <p>Set against an evergreen, this witch hazel sparkles in Flagler</p>
 <p>Distinctive holes in the bark of the saucer magnolia in Flagler were made by yellow-bellied sapsuckers</p>	<p>Bark. Much like our own skin, tree bark is a protective layer of dead tissue continually renewed from within. It keeps out moisture from rain, prevents moisture loss when air is dry, insulates against heat/cold and is a barrier to environmental threats. Also like us, when trees are young, bark is thin and smooth. Sometimes as trees age, the outer layers crack and wrinkle. Take time on your walkabout in this quiet season to appreciate the colors and textures unique to each tree species.</p>	 <p>A winter day comes alive when you walk along paths in Flagler & spot these 'Natchez' crape myrtles</p>
 <p>There are a few of these specimens in Flagler Garden – and they look even more sensational in real life</p>	<p>+Yellow-fruited American holly, <i>Ilex opaca</i> f. <i>xanthocarpa</i>, is a naturally occurring variant of the traditional red-fruiting American holly and a female clone requiring pollination from a nearby male tree. Named the 2018 Holly of the Year by the Holly Society of America, it provides year-round interest with its rich green foliage and golden-yellow berries, shelter for wildlife, and is especially attractive to fruit-eating birds such as robins and bluebirds in winter.</p>	 <p>The analogous colors of yellow and green make these trees as attractive to us as to the birds</p>
 <p>The first to bloom, this <i>P. mume</i>, the apricot tree, harkens the Chinese New Year – look for it along the Cherry Tree Walk</p>	<p>Prunus. This genus of stone fruits contains more than 340 species worldwide in temperate climates. Currently, delicate pink blossoms with a spicy scent are emerging on <i>P. mume</i> 'Dawn', a native of China cultivated for over 1500 yrs. Endemic to Korea is later blooming <i>P. takesimensis</i>, whose form and smooth reddish-brown glossy bark provide a sculptural element. Lens-shaped pores (lenticels) enable gas exchange between the atmosphere and the tree's interior.</p>	 <p>Also along the Walk is the <i>P. takesimensis</i>, a tree so water-tolerant that it is planted along the Tidal Basin in D.C.</p>
 <p>Atop the <i>Juniperus virginiana</i> by the Children's Garden, a cedar waxwing is resting after a feast</p>	<p>Juniper, <i>Juniperus</i>, vary in size and shape from tall trees to low spreading shrubs. They are evergreens with needle-like and/or scale-like leaves. Not a true berry, female seed cones are distinctive, with fleshy, fruit-like coalescing scales, fused together to form a "berry"-like structure. Many juniper species exist but only a few, primarily <i>Juniperus communis</i>, are used for culinary purposes. Others can be toxic. Enjoy the 38 species of Juniper located throughout the Garden.</p>	 <p>These beautiful blue seed cones on the native juniper feed many of our local birds</p>