

RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

Norfolk Botanical Garden

by Laken Burns



IN 1938, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) assigned a group of African American workers to establish a public garden—with a focus on azaleas—on 175 acres of swampland in Norfolk, Virginia. Three years later, 5,000 azaleas, along with thousands of other shrubs, trees, and bulbs had been planted. This garden has evolved into what is known today as the Norfolk Botanical Garden (NBG), which now comprises an even broader range of plants and gardens.

SHOWCASING HORTICULTURAL DIVERSITY

Among the 60 plus themed gardens at NBG is a **WPA Memorial Garden** that commemorates the 220 African Ameri-



Top: The Sarah Lee Baker Perennial Garden in May. Above: Azaleas bloom in the WPA Memorial Garden in late spring.

can laborers who originally created the garden. An additional legacy is that many of the azaleas they planted still bloom around nearby **Mirror Lake**. More azaleas fill the **Rhododendron Glade**, where they mingle with other woodland shrubs and trees. Visitors also can admire several other significant collections of specific plants such as hydrangeas, camellias, hollies, and roses. And NBG's crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* spp.) collection is “the only collection of this genus in North America accredited by the American Public Gardens Association Plant Collections Network,” says Les Parks, NBG's director of horticulture.

Examples of various design styles include the grand **Renaissance Garden**,



Above: Boat tours during the summer months provide a relaxing way for visitors to experience the gardens. Right: Kids enjoy cooling off in the fountains in the World of Wonders Children's Garden.

featuring a reflecting pool, fountain, and symmetrical lines; the **Sarah Lee Baker Perennial Garden**, a formal circular garden bisected by terraced canals flowing away from a central fountain; and the traditional **Japanese Garden**, honoring Norfolk's sister city of Kitakyushu.

EDUCATION AND EXPLORATION

Other areas in NBG focus on providing educational experiences, especially the **World of Wonders Children's Garden**. Spanning over three acres, this gar-



den engages youngsters with hands-on learning about plants, soil, and insects, and allows them to explore biomes from around the world. Beginning June 14, this garden area will feature special programs and exhibits around the theme of "Hip Habitats & Happening Homes," designed to encourage kids and their families to take conservation-minded actions in their communities.

Visitors of all ages will be captivated by some of nature's loveliest pollinators in the **Bristow Butterfly Garden**. Opening June 15 for the summer months, the enclosed **Butterfly House** allows up-close observation of several butterfly species. On July 13, NBG and the Butterfly Society of Virginia will hold their annual Butterfly Festival, which will feature family-friendly demonstrations and activities.

HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 320 sites throughout North America! Here's how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens. This list is also published in a booklet. To order, visit www.ahsgardening.org/RAPGuideHelp.
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden's discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.

YEAR-ROUND BEAUTY

NBG's diverse gardens and plantings ensure that every season has something to offer to visitors. "Norfolk Botanical Garden is both a place where the horticulturally minded can see several plant collections and unusual species, and where everyone can simply enjoy the beauty of nature," says Parks. "To the local community, it is an oasis, a refuge, and the green heart of Coastal Virginia." 🌿

Laken Burns is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.

Additional Information

Norfolk Botanical Garden

6700 Azalea Garden Road
Norfolk, VA 23518. (757) 441-5830
www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org

- Hours: April 1–Oct. 15: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Oct. 16–March 31: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Fees: Adult \$12; Seniors, Military, and Children (ages 3–17) \$10. Toddlers 2 and under free with parent or guardian.
- RAP benefits: AHS members receive free admission.