

Tropical Garden



Come see the animals in our gardens!



Is this Virginia or the Virgin Islands? Are the tropics alive and well in Norfolk, or is this an illusion?

It's not a trick. Flourishing on the grounds of the Virginia Zoo, towering windmill palms, lush clumps of banana trees, giant-leafed elephant ears, and brilliant hibiscus make this Zone 8 garden their year-round home. Here is the ideal setting for both exotic plants and animals. To create a tropical look, think BIG: Big leaves, big flowers, and bright, bold colors. Using evergreens to form a year-round framework, fill in with

perennials, annuals, and add a few real tropical plants to spice up the summer season.

Starting at the top:

For gardens with lots of space or gardeners who like creative pruning:

- Empress tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) Zone 5-9, 30-50'
- Large leaf magnolias (*Magnolia acuminata*, *macrophylla*, etc.) Zone 5-8
- Shining sumac (*Rhus copallina*) Zone 4-9, 20'
- Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) Zone 6-9, evergreen, 80'

Midrange Shrubs and Small Trees:

- Bamboo (clumping *Bambusa* or *Fargesia* are less invasive), Zone 7-9, evergreen
- Bananas- Red Abyssinian Banana (*Ensete maurelii*), Zone 8-10, 10'?, huge, burgundy tinged leaves.
- Hardy Banana (*Musa basjoo*) Zone 7-10, 10' tall
- Pink Velvet Banana (*Musa velutina*) Zone 7b-10, 6' tall, pink flower, sets inedible fruit
- Chinese Yellow Banana (*Musella lasiocarpa*) Zone 7 (special care) –10, 6' tall, shrubby with yellow blooms
- Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) Zone 8-10, evergreen
- Magnolia 'Little Gem' (*Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem'), dwarf 15-20', evergreen, Zone 5-9
- Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), especially dark leaf 'Summer Chocolate' Zone 6B-9
- Windmill palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), Zone 7b-10, evergreen

Perennials:

- Angel trumpet (*Brugmansia x candida* 'Double White', et al.) Zone 7b-10
- Canna lilies (*Canna* var.), Zone 7-10, many to choose from, Zoo favorites:
 - 'Australia'- shiny, purple/black leaves, red flower
 - 'Bengal Tiger'- green and yellow striped leaves, orange flower
 - 'Phaison'- purple, yellow, and red striped leaves, orange flower
 - Confederate rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*) Zone 7b-10, late blooming, double pink
 - Crinum lily (*Crinum* sp.) Zone 7-10, 2-4' strap-like leaves, white-pink flowers
 - Daylily (*Hemerocallis*) especially spider forms 'Jersey Spider' and 'Spider Man' or towering, 6' 'Autumn Minaret' and 'Challenger'

Tropical Garden cont.

- Elephant ear (*Alocasia* or *Colocasia*) Zone 7b-10, loves moisture
- Hardy ginger lily (*Hedychium* var.) Zone 7-10, fragrant, late summer flowers
- Hardy hibiscus or rose mallow 'Moy Grande', 'Fantasia', or 'Disco Belle', HUGE summer blooms of white, lavender, pink, and red, Zone 5-9
- Scarlet mallow (*Hibiscus coccineus*) Zone 6-9, wetland native with palmate leaves and large red flowers.

Annuals:

- Castor bean (*Ricinus communis* var.) 5-12' tall, huge, hand-shaped leaves in green, reddish green, and burgundy ('New Zealand') POISONOUS
- Coleus (*Solenostemon*) both sun and shade varieties, beautiful foliage colors
- Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) Hibiscus flowers plus strange, edible pods
- Naranjilla (*Solanum quitoense*) 2', spiked, purple velvety leaves, orange fruit
- Swan plant (*Asclepias physocarpa*) 6', white flowered, spiky podded butterfly weed
- Summer poinsettia (*Amaranthus tricolor* var.) 4' stalks topped in bright pink, yellow, or yellow/red/green mix

For shady jungles:

- Bear's Breech (*Acanthus* 'Summer Beauty') glossy, cutleaf foliage, 6' spike of white flowers in summer Zone 6-8
- Caladium (*Caladium* sp) 8"-16" tall, multicolored, elephant ear shaped leaves
- Cast iron plant (*Aspidistra* sp) evergreen, lance shaped leaves Zone 7-10
- Coleus (*Solenostemon*) both sun and shade varieties, beautiful foliage colors
- Elephant ears (*Alocasia* or *Colocasia*) loves moisture, light shade ok, Zone 7b-10
- Fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*) Evergreen shrub with wide, lobed leaves, Zone 8-10
- Gold dust plant (*Aucuba japonica*) 4-6', evergreen shrub, solid green or green and gold leaves Zone 6-10
- Hosta (*Hosta* var.) Huge 'Sum and Substance' especially Zone 3-9
- Italian arum (*Arum italicum*) 12", lance shaped foliage in winter! Zone 4-9
- Leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum*) round leaves spotted with gold, 18-24" tall Zone 7-9
- Needle palm (*Rhapidophyllum hystrix*) Shrubby form, fan-like leaves, 6" needles form at the base of the leaves Zone 6-10
- Sacred lily (*Rohdea japonica*) evergreen, 15" tall, long, strap leaves, red berry stalks in summer Zone 6-10



Now add a couple pink flamingoes. Pour a tall, cool drink. Turn up the Jimmy Buffett CD. Hang in the hammock, and bask in your own tropical paradise.