

THE ONE

Although asking a hort pro to name their favorite plant is a tough question, we nevertheless nailed down three of the state’s most esteemed experts. Peggy Singlemann, Patrick Morrissey, and Perry Mathewes identified their top choices, and they’re identified on page 79 in the August ‘24 edition of *Virginia Living*. Read on for more of their infinite wisdom.

PEGGY SINGLEMANN:

“My signature plant is *Baptisia australis*,” declares the encyclopedic Peggy Singlemann, who recently retired as Maymont’s director of horticulture. Now a TV star and host of *Virginia Home Grown* on VPM/PBS, she’s also a sought after garden consultant and speaker. “It’s native to Virginia, is a spring bloomer, and can be paired with early-blooming daffodils,” she continues. Also known as false indigo, *B. australis* is a superstar in the garden with its blue blossoms, deer resistance, and drought tolerance.

It’s happy in both sun and part shade and grows in heavy clay or sandy loam. Singlemann praises it for being a pollinator supporter and a plant that beginner gardeners and non-gardeners can grow successfully. Plus, it makes stunning additions to flower arrangements and doesn’t mind being in containers. “I love the foliage and the many varieties too,” she adds. “And it’s in the legume family, so it’s a nitrogen fixer.”

PATRICK MORRISSEY

Patrick Morrissey is the landscape manager at the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont in Charlottesville. While BGP is a relatively new kid on the block, Morrissey brings with him decades of experience in horticulture and traces his love of gardening to his mother’s rose garden that he grew to appreciate while waiting for the school bus as a child. His one? “For me today, serviceberry is the one. *Amelanchier arborea* x *grandiflora* is native cultivar that is landscape friendly,” Morrissey says, who adds that the species, *A. arborea* can be found natively in every county in Virginia and works well in landscapes with both natives and non-natives.

He describes it as “a large deciduous shrub, with showy white flower,” adding that it has berries that the birds love and beautiful red fall color. “With the attractive bark, it has interest year round,” he says. “There is no need for pest management with serviceberry.” It’s also known by its other common name, shadbush.

PERRY MATHEWES

Perry Mathewes, deputy director of museum operations and director of gardens at Winchester’s Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, recommends Carolina allspice—*Calycanthus floridus*. But



Mathewes is clear: “First of all,” he tells me, “I want to go on the record that I don’t have ONE single plant that is my favorite.” Plus he says the best gardens are full of diversity and always provide something of interest throughout the year. But back to Carolina allspice, which Mathewes’ mother called Sweet Betsy and is often known as sweetshrub. It does well in full sun, but it’s also naturally an understory shrub. It can be effective as a specimen plant or used as hedges.

“Part of the reason I like this shrub so much is because it is so unusual,” he says, adding, “it has maroon flowers and as a husband and dad to three Hokies, that is always a plus at my house. Some people call the color wine-red, but we know better.” The flowers are generally fragrant and often described as smelling like strawberry, pineapple, or banana. “It blooms primarily in the spring but puts out sporadic flowers in the summer and has great yellow fall color,” says Mathewes. It is native to Virginia but has two slightly distinct areas it is found—one in the coastal plain and the other in the southern mountains and the state’s Piedmont region. In other words, it can grow just about anywhere in the Commonwealth. If you really want an unusual but quality plant for your garden, this is always a great choice.

