

Tidewater Camellia Club Show and Festival

Lloyd Singleton

Director of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Center for New Hanover County at the Arboretum

Mums are the flowers for Thanksgiving, Christmas has its poinsettias, and red roses represent love for Valentine's Day. Alternatively, there is a flowering landscape shrub suited to our region that provides red, white or pink blooms through those seasons as well, the camellia. The lush blossoms of camellias have enhanced many southern landscapes for over a century. While there are a couple hundred species of the genus *camellia* in its native ranges of Asia, only a few species are widely grown here; two for ornamental value and one for culinary purposes.

Camellia sasanqua blooms in the late fall and early winter. *Camellia japonica* blooms in late winter and early spring with large, deeply colored blossoms. *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant, blooms in early fall with small white flowers and emerald green foliage which is the source of tea buds and leaves, important for one of the favorite beverages of the southeastern United States. *Camellia japonica* is perhaps the least hardy of these plants with some cultivars damaged at about 10F. *Sasanqua* is more hardy, withstanding temperatures in the range of 5F and the tea plant is even hardier still, taking temperatures as low as 0F.

Camellias, similar to azaleas and rhododendrons, thrive in moist, well-drained, slightly acid soils in partial shade. However, most camellias will do well in full summer sun after a period of acclimation and will probably flower more prolifically in full sun.

These broad-leaved evergreen large shrubs or small trees have been the favorites of camellia fanciers long enough for there to be hundreds of named cultivars of the principal ornamental types. Here at the Arboretum, we are host to more than 130 cultivars. With our extensive camellia collection, we are proud to host the annual Tidewater Camellia Club Show and Festival again this year. The celebration is mostly virtual this year, with an online process that will allow participants and judges to enter blooms and conduct



Above: Happy birthday is a camellia japonica cultivar in bloom right now.

Right: Camellia japonica Bobbie Fain variegated provides a fistfull of winter color.

[CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

the judging with minimal training and no special software required. The show has 17 qualified judges and 30 exhibitors with over 300 blooms entered. The judging process kicks off Sunday, Feb 21 through Sunday, Feb. 28. Winners and judged blooms will be available at <https://www.tidewatercamelliaclub.org/> on Monday, March 1.

The festival offers a few in-person tours and workshops. Arboretum events are already full but check Tidewater's website for other tour options. The Arboretum tours

will give participants a rare opportunity to explore the history and beauty of the Arboretum's *Camellia japonica*, *sasanqua*, and hybrids while these beautiful camellias are in full bloom. The club leads a free workshop to learn how to propagate camellias using air layering, which is a process whereby rooting compound and sphagnum moss are

applied to a healthy branch to create a new limb with roots. Free camellia care presentations and local camellia art displays are available by visiting <https://www.tidewatercamelliaclub.org/>. Plants

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are available for purchase at local garden centers.

The roots of the Tidewater Camellia Club go back to 1952 to the organization of Men's Garden Club by Mr. Henry Rehder. By 1958, club membership reached over 100, and in 1960, the club's name was changed to Tidewater

Camellia Club. The club has sponsored a camellia show every year since 1956, except when canceled due to a freeze. This local club is also engaged nationally, with four of its members elected as President of the American Camellia

Society. Last year, the American Camellia Society designated the New Hanover County Arboretum an "American Camellia Trail."

The Arboretum is free and open every day from 8 a.m.

to 5 p.m. Lloyd Singleton is director of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Center for New Hanover County, located at the Arboretum, 6206 Oleander Drive. Reach him at lsingleton@nhcgov.com or 910-798-7660.