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## Camellias

### for Santa Rosa County Gardeners

Michelle White, SRCMGV

Camellias have their origins in Asia and are well suited for our NW Florida gardens. This is a plant that blooms in the late fall and/or winter. Who wouldn't like to have something blooming then? Here in Santa Rosa County, we are hardiness zones 8a-9b. The northern part is 8a and close to the Gulf is 9b. That means there are 5 species of Camellias that can grow here. (See table 1 on page 2.)

**Camellia japonica** (Figure 1) is the most prevalent with over 2000 varieties. They like a shady spot in the garden or under a pine tree with 2- 6 hours of sunlight. They are good as a screen since they get 6-10 feet wide and 25 feet tall but can be pruned to a more manageable 7-12 feet in height. Depending on variety, they bloom between December and March.

**Camellia sasanqua** (Figure 2), commonly known as "Shi-Shi" Camellias, are little gems for gardeners since they are mostly 2-4 feet wide and 3-6 feet tall. They do well in part shade to full sun (4 – 6 hours or more of sun). They bloom from November – December.



Figure 1. Photo:  
Sydney Park Brown



Figure 2. Photo:  
Michelle White



The *Camellia reticulata* varieties (Figure 3) are the least cold hardy. They must be protected against an evening frost, but they are worth it. They are the largest up to 50 feet tall and 12 feet wide, but again most are kept to a more manageable size of 10-12 feet tall. They have an open, somewhat gangly shape, with up to 10 inches wide flowers flowing down each branch giving these plants an arching/weeping shape. Find them a shady spot getting 2- 6 hours of sunlight and enjoy the show between December and March.



Figure 3. Photo: Cathy Dewitt NC State Univ.

Another reason to like Camellias is that tea comes from the Sinensis species. They bloom in the fall with smaller, less showy flowers. Depending on the variety, they may prefer part shade (4-6 hours of sunlight) to full sun. Capable of reaching 15 feet tall by 10 feet wide, most are kept to 4-5 feet tall and wide. The final variety is Oleifera. It is commonly known as the Tea Oil Tree. This is the most cold-hardy variety, shaking off even snow in zone 6. They are cultivated throughout Asia for the cooking oil from their seeds. They can reach 15-20 feet tall and 10 -15 ft. wide, blooming mid -to-late fall with less showy flowers.

All Camellias are long-lived plants. Proper placement in the garden will provide years of enjoyment so consider light requirements when selecting a Camellia. All like slightly acidic (pH of 5.5-6) well drained soil. Plant in late fall or winter to give the plant time to establish roots and it could bloom the first year. Just make sure to plant the root ball 1-2 inches above the soil line.

As with any plant, there are pests that can cause problems. Two common ones are spider mites (figure 4) and tea scale (figure 5).



Figure 4: Spider mites

Photo: Lance Osborne, UF IFAS



Figure 5: Tea Scale

Photo: Lance Osborne, UF IFAS

Both are insects that suck the leaves. They live on the undersides of the leaves, so check your Camellias on a regular basis. Look for white dusty patches (scale) or webs and “poke-a-dotted” leaves (spider mites).

If caught early you can remove them by hand, but if it is a large problem the use of insecticidal oil or soap can control these pests. Good luck, the Santa Rosa County, IFAS Extension Office is here for you.

	Japonica	Sasanqua	Reticulata	Sinensis	Oleifera
<b>Grow Zones</b>	7 - 9	7 - 9	8a - 10b	7 - 9	6a - 9b
<b>height</b>	10 - 25 ft but most are 7 - 12 ft	1.5-15 ft but most are 2 - 6 ft	12 - 50 ft but most are 10 - 12 ft	10 - 15 ft but most are kept to 4 - 5 ft	15 - 20 ft
<b>width</b>	6 - 10 ft	2 - 6 ft	8 - 12 ft	6 - 10 ft	10 -15 ft
<b>Flowering - variety dep</b>	Dec - Mar	Nov - Dec	Dec - Mar	Fall	Fall -Winter
<b>Sunlight required</b>	Part Shade 2 - 6 hours sunlight	Full sun, Part shade 4 - 6 hours or more	Part shade 2 - 6 hours sunlight	variety dep - full sun or part shade	Full sun, Part Shade 4 -6 hours sunlight

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP002>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/camellia/>

## December Gardening Reminders

### Flowers:

-If the area receives cold temperatures and plants freeze, do not prune out damaged wood until spring.

### Trees and Shrubs:

-Resist the urge to fertilize outdoor plants.

-Collect and stick hardwood cuttings in soil or potting soil, including: privet, forsythia, wisteria, honeysuckle, crape myrtle, althea, fig, quince, grape and hibiscus.

### Fruits and nuts:

-Apply a spray of horticultural oil to dormant fruit trees.

-Harvest pecans early in order to insure good quality. Nut quality decreases rapidly if they are allowed to lay on wet ground for several days. Store them in a clean, dry place.

-Remove sucker growth below the graft of citrus.

### Vegetables:

-Vegetables that can be established this month: beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, onions, parsley and radish.

### Lawns:

-Begin "over seeding" winter lawns when needed.

-Water the winter lawn as needed by checking the soil moisture



Photo: unsplash  
Frost damaged plants

## Cast Iron Plant: A Plant for Deep Shade

Lois Scott, SRCMGV



*Aspidistra elatior*

Photo: Lois Scott

Cast Iron plant also known as the bar-room plant because it's often been used as a decorative plant in dark smoky bars. It is truly a "toughie".

Cast Iron plant, *Aspidistra elatior*, is much loved for its long, wide and glossy evergreen leaves. It shines even in the shade. Dappled shade is okay and it is amazing in deep shade where the sun never shines. It grows in slowly spreading clumps and is tolerant of all kinds of soil and water conditions. However, it does not like to be planted in full sun. One can find Cast Iron plants sold in the big box stores.

I have a personal story of how easy it is to grow this beauty. I left a clump of Cast Iron plant unplanted under a tree and weeks later I found that it had rooted right where it was left.

I think **Cast Iron** is an apt name for this plant !

### ***Aspidistra elatior***

Perennial

Height = 18-36"

Light= shade to full shade

Soil= clay, sand, loam, slightly alkaline to acid.

Tolerance= moderately drought tolerant, tolerates poor soil

For more information see

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FP053>

## Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

**For a listing of local offices visit**

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

**Follow us on Facebook for updates**

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

**The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. [joshua.criss@ufl.edu](mailto:joshua.criss@ufl.edu)**



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