



Gainesville Camellia Society

Affiliated with the American Camellia Society

Editor: Anna Langford

March 2026

President's Message

Hi All

This Camellia season keeps appearing to be over and then the blooms start popping open again. We went to the Middle Georgia Camellia Show at Masee Lane. They had 1113 blooms in spite of the cold weather. We had a great time seeing old friends and making a few new ones.

We have grafted 15 plants and have 12 to go. Our grandson Christopher did three of those - it's his first ones. It's almost too hot.

Our very own Wally Belgard went to Valdosta, Georgia, and got a grafting lesson from the pros, Mark Crawford and JD Thomerson. Their efforts produced 22 grafts.

I hope everyone has signed up to participate in the Kanapaha Spring festival. It is a good learning experience for the inexperienced and a great opportunity to meet others. Plus, you get to explore other booths and check out all the vendors.



Christopher Rathbun learning to graft



Mark Allen variegated

Our very own John Swanson will be showing us how he prunes his Camellias. Anyone who has been to his gardens knows that he is a great grower. John is getting ready to have another air layering party at his house but he will give details about that. I'm going to see if it's something that I can do. Let's learn together!

See you Sunday,

Debbie Ellis, President

Minutes for GCS Meeting – February 15, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 2:12 PM. President Debbie Ellis welcomed our three new members: Anne Clark, who helped with the camellia show; Cynthia Dewitt from Middleburg who has been growing camellias most of her life and decided to join us; and Patricia Fuller, who moved from St. Petersburg and is bringing camellias into their yard, which currently has none. Very exciting!

No old business was discussed.

New business: The Kanapaha Spring Garden Festival is coming up. Jerry Hogsette noted that "it is quite an affair" and said volunteers are needed. We don't sell anything; we just talk and hand out information to new people. Wristbands are required and can be purchased for this event, or you can buy a Kanapaha membership and get reimbursed by GCS. We will be in the room to the left of the registration desk. Shifts are 3–4 hours, require more than one person and take place on March 21–22. Volunteers can see the rest of the festival after their shift. It's always a good time and parking is available. This is for the informational booth only.



Wendy



Tama Americana

The February 28th Masee Lane show is on the schedule and several GCS members hope to make it. A group trip to Masee Lane was discussed and several members have shown interest in going.

The ACS convention in Charleston, SC is next weekend and several members will be attending.

John Swanson discussed the Master Gardeners Program and its Dreamers Garden. He said that GCS has an established relationship with the garden, and we've agreed to provide 5 plants for the Dreamers Garden. Specifically, to provide camellias with fragrant blooms to benefit garden visitors who are visually impaired.



Amy Puccio mentioned that her organization, GROW HUB, is setting up irrigation and would like help on March 14th from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. GROW HUB focuses on cultivating, empowering and assisting disabled adults toward sustainable living through education, training and job opportunities. GROW HUB is located at 2900 NE 8th Ave, Gainesville.

Treasurer's report:
 \$18597.90 checking
 \$5,208.77 savings
 \$23,806.67 total

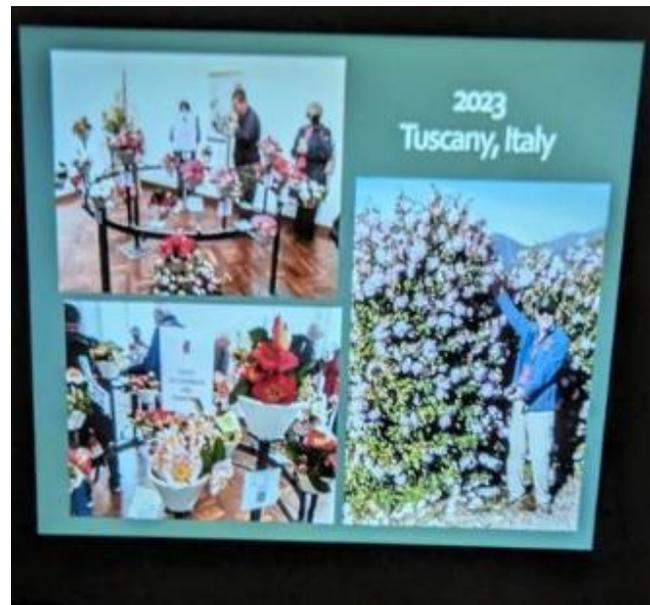


Ruth Vickers Fullwood

Wally Belgard introduced Forrest Latta. His talk is titled "Camellias in America: An International Heritage." Forrest discussed an event that will never happen again in our lifetime: the International Camellia Society annual meeting occurring in the United States in 2027. The United States is hosting the joint ICS and ACS National Convention. He also shared photographs from camellia shows he attended in Japan, Spain, and Italy.

In this presentation, Forrest detailed the history of specific cultivars arriving in the United States from Asia and Europe. 'Alba Plena' arrived in NY in 1798. There are over 27,000 cultivars now. The US is the top country, accounting for one-third of these cultivars. Forrest encouraged folks to visit the Mobile Botanical Gardens to see the Kosaku Sawada winter garden in Alabama. He discussed the international story behind camellias, winter gardening and cultural eco-tourism. He noted that being a camellia owner is a form of stewardship. He encouraged all stewards to put their camellias out into the community and show them off "set them free."

He discussed Dr. Hardrada and Harold Hume, the "George Washington of the camellia society." Their book "Camellias in America" (1946) is available online on the ICS website for free and Forrest considers this book the "big bang" of the camellia world. Hume created a test garden with Roy Wilmot to discuss the nomenclature problems, as several discrepancies existed. It wasn't just an American problem; it was an international problem. The ICS was formed in 1962 really for much the same reasons on an international level to solve nomenclature issues. E.G. Waterhouse was the first president of ICS and Hume was on the advisory board. The Official Registrar for Genus Camellia was created by the international society of horticulture scientists.



Forrest went on to discuss the five main roles of ICS: International Camellia Register, IC Journal, IC Gardens of Excellence, and international fellowship and exchange through the IC Congress. To the group's excitement, we learned that the Four Seasons hybrids for the U.S. market developed in China will be part of the Southern Living plant series possibly late this year and early 2027 for 3 gals. A ceremonial planting of the Four Seasons camellia will take place at Masee Lane. Date TBA.

The International Camellia Congress includes "fun, travel, famous gardens, good food, fellowship and camellias." While in Tokyo, Forrest and the group met the Princess of Japan as they traveled through Kyoto. He said, "Seeing Japonicas in Japan was incredible!" The camellia show in Osaka displays camellias in tall vases made of bamboo reeds that hold water. They enjoy displaying historical art and books - it is similar to a festival. They have expert programs. It is not a judged show, rather, it is an exhibit.



He witnessed two experts discussing camellias in two different languages and understanding each other perfectly. He was presented with the flag for the ICS congress 2027. Forrest shared his experience and photos of Mark Crawford in Tuscany, Italy in 2023 in front of a camellia covered in blooms. In Spain, each person at the camellia shows is given their own table the night before with their blooms to assemble arrangements. It is an impressive sight to see how many are at one table. In Cornwall, England, the camellia club provides the base and the camellia growers cut a branch section to arrange the flowers in it. They have big bases full of camellia blooms; it's very dramatic.

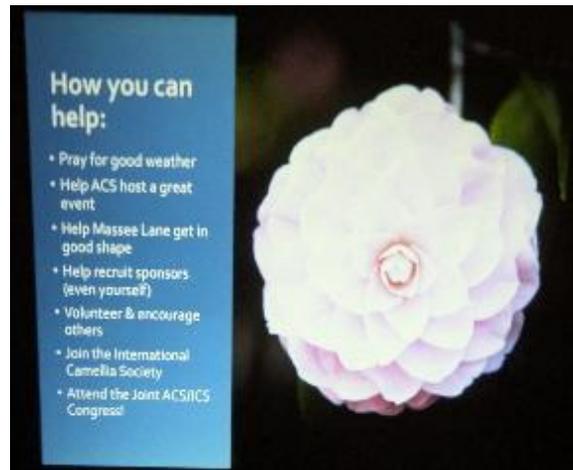


Concluding the talk, Forrest discussed next year's ICS/ACS convention. Pre-Congress will be held in Mobile, AL, from January 22–25, 2027. The venue is The Grand Hotel, and Forrest highly recommended attending this pre-congress meeting. The Main Congress and Joint ACS Convention will be held in Macon, GA, from January 26-31 at the Marriott. Post-Congress will be held in Savannah, GA, from January 31 to February 3. The venue will be in the downtown historic district.



Forrest noted that "while we cannot compete with the tradition of Japan, the architecture of Italy or the food and wine in Spain, what we have is our culture, they are fascinated with our American culture (music, entertainment). He was excited to announce that Jim and Judy Nuccio will be there, and Dr. Bradford King will be present and honored at the event. He will be chairing and interviewing on stage with Jim Nuccio and discussing the Nuccio Heritage. The international camellia community wants to share appreciation for the Nuccios and their contributions.

How can you help with the upcoming ICS/ACS meeting? Forrest is the chairman of the ACS planning committee and Vice President of the ICS. He said we are welcome to volunteer, recruit sponsors (or become a sponsor), help Massee Lane get in good shape, help ACS host a great event, attend the joint ACS/ICS congress, or join the ICS.



Forrest answered questions from the eager crowd. One member asked if the camellias grow in full sun in Tuscany? Forrest answered yes--- they were growing in full sun, no cover, and it may be a myth that they require shade. In Mobile, many of his camellias grow in full sun but also enjoy the shade from a tall pine. He also shared his interest in light and bloom setting. He encouraged people to read the old journals and find the science behind bloom setting.

Another member asked if there will be a show during the ICS/ACS meeting. Forrest answered that they are in talks to do an exhibit, not a judged show—they want to encourage everyone in the area to bring in camellias for the exhibition. Lastly, Forrest was very excited to share with the group Hume's book, "Gardening in the Lower South" (1926). Forrest collects all of Hume's original writings. He encouraged everyone to go to the UF library to seek out the Hume publications that arrived in boxes. The creation of the ACS notes is found in these boxes. The basis for the ICS from Roy Wilmot was found in the ACS library's notes.

Forrest Latta's presentation ended at 3:18pm. President Debbie Ellis thanked Forrest for the enlightening presentation and conversation. We broke for refreshments and the plant auction.

Cat Spurgeon, Secretary

A note from the GCS VP

I'm sorry to miss several of our meetings due to other obligations. I hope to make it to the May meeting.

Some thoughts from the 2026 ACS Convention

Some Camellia Societies have robust public outreach programs to get young people interested in the Society. They give lectures at schools and public events. At Shows they have baskets of blooms for people to handle. Touching the flowers as well as seeing them provides a closer connection for all ages!

Some Camellia Societies also have civic interaction programs aimed at planting Camellias in designated public spaces. A sign stating the donation was by the local Society is placed in front of each Camellia plant along with the name of the variety. The local maintenance crews water and fertilize the plants along with other co-located civic plantings. The local Society is only contacted if there's a problem.

As you know the International Camellia Society (ICS) will have its annual meeting in Georgia this year concomitant with the ACS National Convention. I'd like us to consider having a GCS-funded trip for one active member or couple that could be awarded via some sort of random selection process like a raffle.

The cost of the four day event will be announced in May. I'm guessing it will be about \$2,500 for the dual registration fee, meals and one hotel room for four nights. We can offset some of the cost via member donations to the cause, and possibly some cost for raffle tickets although I would prefer that all active members that want be allowed to participate without cost.

Also, in the past GCS has sponsored a bus-trip to Masee Lane Gardens. Everyone who wanted to go paid about \$35 and we had good times! How about considering doing that again, even this year?

Charles Simon, First Vice President

Air Layering Event

2026 Air Layering will be at Swanson's on May 1 from 9-12. Mark your calendars. Pot lunch at about 12:30. Lists of supplies needed and plants available for air layering are attached to this newsletter.

Date and place of meeting		Refreshments	
		Food	Drinks
3/15/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Charles & Diane Simon	Charles & Diane Simon
4/19/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Victoria & Amanda Watson	Linda & Howard Eckinrode
5/17/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Summer Potluck Party	Wally Belgard

Dues

The annual dues for Gainesville Camellia Society are due at this time. The amount is \$15 for an individual or \$20 for a couple. Please mail a check for your dues to the Treasurer:

Merry Reid
7631 Monongahela Avenue
Keystone Heights FL 32656
reidm729@gmail.com

Follow Us on Social Media

The Gainesville Florida Camellia Society <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61570106033309>
GCS Facebook Message Board: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2046931395806031>
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/gainesville_camellia_society/

If you have some photos you would like to share of your camellias, but are not on social media sites, consider sending them to Cat Spurgeon and she will get them posted for you. Ensure you include the variety and/or cultivar, if you have a short story regarding the camellia, you are invited to include that as well. The purpose of this is to create awareness of the local varieties that our members are growing. This also helps with getting more people interested and involved with identifying the camellias in their yard and around town. Contact Cat at acsgrville@gmail.com or 321.615.2229 for more information or to submit your photos.

New GCS Shirts

Gainesville Camellia Society has official shirts available in two styles: Polo (light blue) and regular t-shirt (stone blue and white). Sizes available range from Small to 3XL for both styles. The cost for either shirt style is \$20. Please contact Cat Spurgeon at acsgville@gmail.com or 321.615.2229 to get yours ordered.



Officers

President: Debbie Ellis
 1st VP & Show Chair: Charles Simon
 2nd VP & Program Chair: Wally Belgard
 Treasurer: Merry Reid
 Secretary: Cat Spurgeon

Board Members

Carter Brenneman
 Rick Davis
 Jay Ellis
 Deborah Engquist
 Jerry Hogsette
 Phil Leilich
 Sanford Porter
 Jill Reid
 Charlie Rye
 Ron Stevens
 Irma Velez

Monthly Meeting of the Gainesville Camellia Society

Date: Sunday, March 15, 2026
Place: Kanapaha Botanical Gardens
Program: “Camellia Grafting” by John Swanson

The Gainesville Camellia Society meets at 2 pm on the third Sunday of each month from September through May in the GRU Conference Room at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. Any changes to meeting dates, times, or venues are posted in this newsletter.