

ainesville Camellia Society

Affiliated with the American Camellia Society

Editor: Anna Langford *October 2026*

President's Message

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Charles Simon for stepping up and taking care of our first meeting. You are deeply appreciated.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all of you for the prayers and support during this time.

Thank God for the rain that we have been getting. Every time that I go into the gardens I see another 6 inches of growth.

I hope everyone has gotten their pruning done and fertilizer out. It's about time to get back to the shows again. I saw my first two blooms last week.

I'm trying to get things whipped back into shape. The vines are trying to take over but hopefully I'm more stubborn. The jury is still out on that one.

Debbie Ellis, President



Black Tie

Minutes for GCS Meeting – September 20, 2026

Vice President Charles Simon presided in President Debbie Ellis's absence. He opened the meeting with a heartfelt remembrance of his friend and former GCS President Jay Ellis, honoring Jay's contributions to the Society and the camellia community.

Amendment to July Board Meeting

An amendment to the July Board meeting minutes recorded a financial balance of $15,500 and approximately $8,000 in proposed philanthropic support, pending a membership vote. Members approved the following allocations:

*UF/IFAS scholarships: $3,000 total for two students, with future awards designated for graduate students rather than undergraduates.

*American Camellia Society memorial brick: $2,000 for a large brick honoring Jay Ellis. Members voted to include Chuck Ritter in the memorial.

*Grow Hub: $1,000 to support its camellia garden.



Asian Moon

Old Business

Charles asked about the status of the separate Wilmot memorial brick. Secretary Cat Spurgeon volunteered to coordinate the order and complete the required form.

Treasurer's Report

Checking	$5,208.89
Savings	$18,450.90
Total	$23,659.79

Treasurer Merry Reid reported the above balances. Merry also reminded members that annual dues are due: $15 for individuals and $20 for couples.

New Business

Anna Langford circulated the refreshment signup sheet, and Charles shared the membership directory for contact information updates. Members were encouraged to join a committee and indicate whether they would be willing to serve as chair. Charles, who also serves as Show Chair, emphasized the importance of beginning preparations earlier this year.

John Swanson's "Pot Party": John Swanson announced plans for this year's air-layer preparation and potting event. Last year's advance preparation worked well, so a couple of volunteers will again gather the day before potting to cut the air layers and soak them overnight.

*Air-layer preparation: Thursday afternoon, October 29.

*Potting: Friday, October 30, approximately 9 a.m. to noon.

*Potluck lunch: Following the potting session.

Camellia Society Events:

Atlantic Coast Camellia Society Regional Director Jill Reed encouraged members to attend the upcoming ACCS convention in Savannah. Although the registration deadline had passed, she indicated that additional attendees might still be accommodated.

Program highlights include a presentation by Grant Montana on his seedlings, a Magnolia Plantation presentation on mapping camellias, and a keynote address by Tommy Alden. Jill also highlighted the auction, which raised $8,000 last year, along with opportunities to socialize and explore Savannah.

John Swanson noted that the convention offers a two- to three-hour session for those interested in developing or renewing their camellia judging credentials.

Charles also discussed a possible joint bus trip with the Ocala Camellia Society to Massee Lane Gardens in the Macon area during the ICS/ACS conference (Saturday, January 30). The proposed outing would be a day trip without an overnight stay. He plans to contact Candy Coaches for pricing and discuss the idea with the Ocala group.

Ritter property for sale: Chuck and Bev Ritter's Melrose home is for sale. The realtor and a neighbor contacted GCS to see if anybody from the camellia society would be interested in this home as there are over 1,000 mature camellias. The realtor was concerned that if a buyer had no interest in the camellias, they would be removed from the grounds. He knew how much the Ritters loved their camellias and would hate to see that happen. They hope the home can be sold to a camellia-lover, or in case of emergency, the plants can be carefully removed. If you have any interest, please contact Roger Buz at 352-514-7000. Listing: https://www.flexmls.com/link.html?1zdylveq0jq8%2C15%2C1%2C30607

Educational Program: "The 10 Best Ways to Kill a Camellia"

Guest speaker JD Thomerson delivered an entertaining and informative presentation on common camellia-growing mistakes—and how to avoid them.

JD began by recognizing GCS's accomplishments and encouraging members to appreciate and sustain their active club. He remembered Chuck Ritter as a "giant in the camellia community," noting his many years of success at shows. JD also encouraged involvement in the Atlantic Coast Camellia Society as a way to meet knowledgeable growers, learn new techniques, and build friendships.

The presentation grew out of an article JD wrote with his daughter's help for the January 2026 edition of the journal. Its playful premise offered practical lessons drawn from his own experiences, including mistakes he made before joining a camellia society. The title of the presentation is based on the movie "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days."

Please understand that these are things you do NOT want to do…

1. Plant it too deep or allow the plant to sink in its hole over time.

JD emphasized planting camellias slightly above the surrounding ground level to allow for settling. He learned this lesson after losing seven or eight camellias before attending his first Valdosta Camellia Society meeting, where he met Mark Crawford and his future mentor, Hulyn Smith.



"JD, you planted it too deep," Hulyn told him. JD had planted his camellias level with the ground, watered them thoroughly, and mulched with pine straw. When the leaves began turning yellow, he assumed they needed more water. Instead, planting too deeply and adding more water had contributed to root rot.

Hulyn explained to him that loose soil settles and the pine bark commonly used in nursery potting mixes gradually breaks down, allowing the root ball to sink. To account for this, JD recommended planting slightly high and firmly pressing the surrounding soil into place. Cover exposed roots with pine bark or pine straw, keeping mulch away from the trunk. If a camellia settles too low over time, carefully lift and replant it at the proper height.

JD said he likes to plant them a couple inches higher than the normal grade, and he mounds extra dirt like an ant hill and firm that up. He doesn't like the roots to be totally exposed because it wicks away water. Pine bark mulch or pine straw mulch is what is recommended to cover any exposed roots.

2. Don't water it regularly after planting and until it gets established (which might be a couple of years).

Pine bark gets dry. He gets 5 gallon buckets and has nail holes in the bottom to allow the plant to gradually soak. If you're hand watering, water for 30 secs, come back and rotate until the ground is soaked.

He removes about 50% of the soil mix from the pot. And plant them high; those roots really don't want to get dry, that's the challenge of growing camellias. Plant them high, don't let them sink, keep them moist. He uses hydrangeas (indicator plants) nearby. That tells him "that it's dry out here". That second year you need to keep them moist, too. If you plant them high they won't root rot. However, after a year if they're not dead you'll have them the rest of your life, most likely. Nurseries don't wrap the roots in burlap anymore, those were great.



3. Use too much fertilizer

Take a conservative approach, particularly with young plants. JD discussed slow-release fertilizers, micronutrients, and organic options, emphasizing that more fertilizer is not always better.Be careful with 10/10/10 you use for your grass, err on too little. JD likes 16/4/8. It can be whatever you want---but not a huge nitrogen content--minor nutrients are great--slow release is important. Three months is how long it lasts, he uses a little handful for a 3 gallon plant. He sprinkles it along the drip line. Other growers put the fertilizer in a hole(s). On huge camellias he will use 10/all because they can handle it just fine. They're 15-20 years old. If they're healthy and blooming, "leave them alone chemicals for minor nutrients, and the organic fertilizer he uses frequently.

4. Plant it in locations that receive full sun all day long or in dense shade.

Japonicas -- once they're established -- can handle the full sun. They may have started in a crowd of trees that have since died. But once they're established, they can take it. When they're little, don't do it. Sasanquas species, like Handelii, can handle full sun. Reticulata, some prefer full sun and can handle full sun--they want to become trees.

5. Plant it in a soggy wet area.

Be mindful of how wet that ground is at certain times of the year. Hurricane season, rainy season, if it's wet for weeks, the camellias won't like it. JD said to consider how a site drains throughout the year, especially during prolonged rain. Camellias can struggle where soil remains saturated.

6. Injure the trunk of the camellia with a weed wacker or in some other way.

Watch out for chipmunks and lawn service companies that fly in and fly out and can hurt the trunk of the camellia tree. They can do great damage. He recommended a protective tree collar.

7. Let mites or scale totally take over the plant

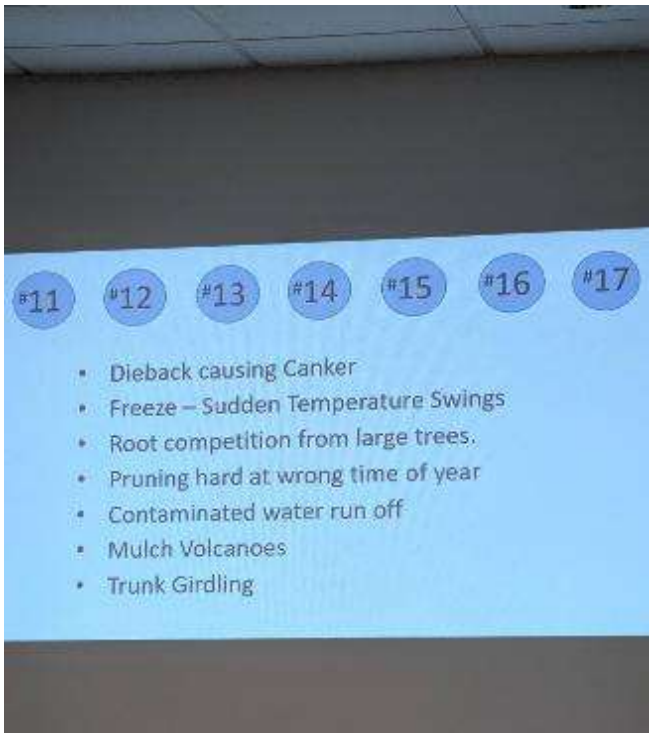
D said that "all mites are bad." Scale is that white cottony stuff on the bottom of the leaf. If it's not getting a lot of air flow, you may have scale. He said that Ultra Fine Oil (not dormant oil, that's for winter) get an all season neem oil. Jerry said he uses dish soap because it breaks the surface tension of the wax. Systemic pesticides, he mentioned Cygon, and it's not used anymore. JD said you paint the trunk of the base of the camellia and you can spray it…you can't buy it anymore--Dimethoate is Cygon, it's approved for soybeans and ag products. It's not labeled for camellias because of the issues. He mentioned Mark Crawford said cover up when you use it. There's worse stuff that can be used, according to JD. Movento is pricey at $600 for a gallon but it will last the rest of your life. You use 1 tsp for a gallon of water. Safari, several other systemics. You won't find them at Home Depot or Lowes. Ask bigger growers, they're using a systemic. Imidacloprid, soil drenches are good. Prune properly so airflow gets in there. Miticides (for mites) Ivermectin, don't use too much because it can kill the good bugs. With mites, you see the brown rust on top, you just need a miticide to kill those suckers. It can weaken a camellia and it can kill them.

8. Plant in hard clay or pure sand

You have to amend it. If they're sitting in sandy or loamy soil on your property--well, your camellia needs to be selected for that type of soil. If you have clay you need to bring in sand and pea gravel, etc., to amend the area.

9. Plant it in soil that has a high alkaline ph or is too acid

pH is everything--camellias like slightly acidic soil. 7 is neutral, 6-6.5 is what his camellias like. If you sample your soil, they can tell you what it is in the area. If your camellias are doing fine--keep doing what you're doing. If the pH is off, your plant cannot absorb any nutrients. It has to have the right pH. Sulfur lowers the pH. City water can also be alkaline or acidic.



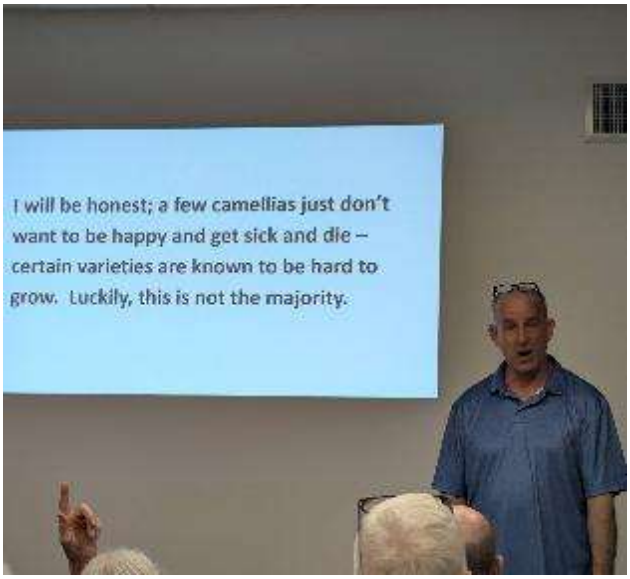
10. Spray the wrong type of weed killer or pre-emergent too close to the camellia or let the spray drift by wind onto the foliage.

Even if you're careful, sometimes the wind can place the droplets on the camellia and kill it. Be careful with what you use in your yard. A pre-emergence herbicide kills the seeds on weeds that are coming up.

JD also discussed root competition from large trees, severe pruning at the wrong time of year, mulch piled against trunks, and contaminated runoff. He recommended spring rather than fall for major pruning. The "Mulch Volcano" he said landscape people do this a lot--"just blow it all up next to the trunk…don't do that." JD mentioned "Trunk Girdling." He recalled a story about a parking lot near a church and how the rainwater would wash down the oil and antifreeze from the pavement and cause damage to the camellias adjacent to the drains.

JD had additional slides that detailed other ways camellias can die, and then asked the group about other ways they have witnessed a camellia die.

During questions, Jill Reed spoke about choosing camellias that perform well in her garden and her preference for plants grown on their own roots. JD expressed interest in writing an article on that topic for the ACCS journal. When Phil asked about favorite white camellias, JD named 'Sea Foam' and 'Snowman.



The educational program concluded at 3:32 p.m., followed by an auction featuring a 'Black Tie' camellia donated by John Swanson, with bidding beginning at $15.

Joanne Theodore suggested turning the presentation's main points into concise care cards to share with customers at the Society's plant sale. JD agreed that his slideshow can be used however we needed. The group gave an overwhelming applause to JD and his wonderful presentation.

Meeting was adjourned for refreshments.

Cat Spurgeon, Secretary

Flower photos are from the garden of John Swanson.

Air Layering Activity

Oct. 29 starting at 1:00 p.m.: Cutting.

It is recommended that those cutting air layers for their personal use should cut them and take them home for soaking and potting. (If they are mixed with the GCS plants they might be lost in the chaos.)
For air layers for GCS plant sales, we will cut and place in buckets for next day's potting.

October 30: Potting Day - schedule starts at 9:00 a.m.

It is a fun team effort. At approximately noon we will be finished. A pot-luck lunch will be enjoyed. Swanson will provide meat and beverages. Others are encouraged to bring side dishes like salads, hot dishes, and/or desserts.

Venue:

2607 NW25th Place, Gainesville 32605

For clarification, call John at 352-672-2644.

Date and place of meeting		Refreshments	
		Food	Drinks
10/18/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Jill Reed & Martha Campbell-Thompson	Sanford Porter
11/15/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Merry Reid	John Swanson & Phil Leilich
12/20/26	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Christmas pot luck party	Linda & Howard Eckenrode
1/17/27	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Allison Kemp	Carter Brenneman
2/21/27	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Victoria & Amanda Watson	Kathy Hoskins
3/14/27	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Charles & Diane Simon	Wendy DeVito
4/11/27	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	Mona Rippe & Anne Clark	Wally Belgard
5/16/27	Kanapaha Botanical Gardens	End of Year pot luck party	Rick Davis

Program for October meeting

Alexa Heilman from Wilmot Botanical Garden will be leading us in an activity they do as part of their therapeutic program. She will bring in flowers, leaves and other materials to use for the activity, but please bring some from home as well. Brightly colored blooms such as zinnias or marigolds and intensely colored plant leaves work well. Sasanqua camellia blooms - especially darker colors - would work well too. We will have a variety of flowers and other plant parts and pound them with a mallet to transfer the colors to either a card or fabric. The effect is something akin to watercolor.

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 acsgville@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		Board Members
President:	Debbie Ellis	Carter Brenneman
1st VP & Show Chair:	Charles Simon	Rick Davis
2nd VP & Program Chair:	Wally Belgard	Jay Ellis
Treasurer:	Merry Reid	Deborah Engquist
Secretary:	Cat Spurgeon	Jerry Hogsette
		Phil Leilich
		Sanford Porter
		Jill Reed
		Charlie Rye
		Ron Stevens
		Irma Velez

Monthly Meeting of the Gainesville Camellia Society

Date: Sunday, October 18, 2026
Place: Kanapaha Botanical Gardens
Program: "A fun activity" with Alexa Heilman

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.