

Atlantic Coast Camellias

Journal of the Atlantic Coast Camellia Society

Volume 71

May 2022

No. 2



Camellia Reticulata 'Terrell Weaver Var.'

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACCS Officers	3
A Message from Our President by Fred McKenna	4
Obituaries	6
The Camellia Blooms of Fame Awards by J. D. Thomerson	8
The Camellia Saga of Dr. James M. Habel, Jr. — A Growing Passion by Shirley Brinkley	18
Historical Camellia Garden in Suffolk, Virginia by Amy Birdsong	21
Short History of the ‘Captain Rawes’ Camellia by J. D. Thomerson (photo by Julie Leisenring)	23
Gerbing Camellia Nursery and Gardens — Then and Now by J. D. Thomerson	25
Do You Know Your Soils PH? by J. D. Thomerson	33
ACCS State Directors	39

From the Cover

Terrell Weaver Var.

Flame to dark red. Large to very large, semidouble to loose peony with thick fluted and twisted petals.

Blooms Midseason. (Reticulata ‘Crimson Robe’ x Japonica ‘Ville de Nantes’) Registered by Walter Homeyer in 1974

Terrell Weaver Var. photos taken by Randolph Maphis



**ATLANTIC COAST CAMELLIA SOCIETY
OFFICERS 2021-22**

PRESIDENT.....Fred McKenna
3740 Battlefield Blvd. S., Chesapeake, VA 23322
757-432-0220, fred.mckenna@me.com

1st VICE PRESIDENT.....Carol Selph
P. O. Box 423, Suwanee, FL 32692
772-577-8863, carolselphaccs@gmail.com

2nd VICE PRESIDENT..... Tommy Alden
3204 Burnett Road, Byron, GA 31008-8308
478-825-1337, tommy@countylinenursery.com

TREASURER.....Fred Jones
2056 Dunn Road, Moultrie, GA 31768
229-224-4919, fredcjones@windstream.net

HISTORIAN.....Randolph Maphis
7476 Skipper Lane, Tallahassee, FL 32317
850-528-4795, crmaphis@comcast.net

EDITORJ. D. Thomerson
111 East Alden Ave., Valdosta, GA 31602
229-412-1227, jthomers@valdosta.edu

WEBMASTERRichard Buggeln
1719 Verrazzano Drive, Wilmington, NC 28405-4227
910-509-1792, rcbuggeln@gmail.com

PAST PRESIDENT.....Randolph Maphis
7476 Skipper Lane, Tallahassee, FL 32317
850-528-4795, crmaphis@comcast.net

***ACCS Convention
September 16-17, 2022
Litchfield Beach & Golf Resort***

Details and Registration Information will be Posted on the
ACCS Website in the Coming Months

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Fred McKenna

“To Improve is to Change, to Be Perfect is to Change Often.”

Winston Churchill

We have completed the 2021-2022 camellia show season and I want to thank all the ACCS members that year after year play such a critical part in planning and executing our camellia shows. Our show season represents our face to the general public and for many clubs, it is the primary venue for gaining new members. We all know from experience what it takes to have a successful camellia show; the advance planning, judging, clerking, arriving for set up and take down, and much more. It is a lot of work. All pieces must flow together to have a successful show. All participants, new members and old, must work as a team.

As we involve our new members in our shows, are we mindful that these new members represent change? With them, change is bound to occur. I remember from my navy days, that every time we would deploy there would be new junior officers having just reported aboard ready to start their new careers. During their watch up on the bridge, they would be wide-eyed and anxious to do well. What I quickly noticed is that one could squash their spirit and their motivation with rigid adherence to petty regulations, and badgering to do things “the way we do it here.” Safety rules had to be strictly followed, and correct operating procedures were required, but the high performing bridge teams allowed the younger officers “the freedom to maneuver” or the “latitude to learn” as they developed their skill set. Many a time I personally would have steered 30 degrees to starboard or slowed by 5 knots, but the junior officer ordered 45 degrees to starboard or slowed by 8 knots. If the situation was safe, and the ship was not going to be embarrassed, I would be quiet and allow the learning event. Often the junior officer would see the error on his own, internalizing his own improvement. If not, a coaching word was in order.

We should look to do the same with the newer, younger members in our camellia clubs. Are we defeating ourselves by not allowing sufficient change to occur as new ideas are offered? Are we mindful there may be a new way to “skin the cat”? Is it right to have strict compliance to the mantra: “because we have always done it this way”? By allowing new members the opportunity to contribute and exercise their good ideas, we enhance their sense of belonging and enthusiasm for our camellia clubs. Of course, we need to provide guidance to prevent real problems, but perfection in a club comes with the ability to change.



Fred and Toni McKenna

Our 2022 ACCS convention will be September 16 and 17, 2022 at the Litchfield Beach and Golf Resort, Litchfield Beach, South Carolina. Planning is well under way, and I need to thank Mack McKinnon and the ACCS Executive Board for the hard work they have made. At the ACCS Spring board meeting held April 11th, the board voted to increase household membership dues to \$25.00 effective May 1, 2022. We have seen how inflation impacts our household operating budgets, and this increase is necessary for the proper operation of our organization.

I look forward to seeing you at future camellia events and I will endeavor to do my best for ACCS.

A Few Exciting New Camellias



Splash



Showboat



Nolan Lewis



Virginia Lynn

Colonel Richard J. Hooton, Jr.



Pensacola - Colonel Richard "Dick" J. Hooton, Jr., USMC/USA (Ret.), 80, passed away on Thursday, March 24, 2022. Dick is the son of the late Ada Holland (Castleberry, AL) and Richard J. Hooton, Sr., of Pensacola, his father being part of the Bonifay-Gonzalez families.

Dick was born and raised in Pensacola, he graduated from PHS in 1959, attended University of Georgia playing football as a walk on, then attended PJC ultimately graduating from UWF, BA in sociology, in 1974. He began his USMC career in 1961, being designated a Naval Aviator in 1963. He served his country for 31 years, including 3 tours in Vietnam. Personal decorations include the Silver Star, 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 52 Air Medals, and 2 Navy Commendation medals.

Dick Hooton had a variety of interests after he retired in 1992. He served for several years on the Pensacola Opera Board of Trustees ending in 2020, and his love for Pavarotti and Puccini was well-known throughout the opera community.

Very active in the camellia community, he was president and board member of the Gulf Coast Camellia Society. His love, however, was the Pensacola Camellia Club where he served on the Board for many years. With hundreds of camellias in his yard on Escambia Bay, he delighted in each and every one, attending camellia shows and showing his flowers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. He was a certified American Camellia Society show judge for many years. Dick won many awards for his beautiful flowers and was known throughout the camellia community for lending a helping hand to novices and judges alike.

Those left to cherish his memory include, his wife of 57 years, Bette (Capasso), of Shelton, CT; a daughter, Anne, of Pensacola; sons, Richard III (Faith) and Joshua (April), of North Carolina; numerous friends and family also survive. Dick Hooton was one tough guy, and he leaves a legacy of strength and courage to guide his family.

Memorial Mass was celebrated at the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel, 21 N. Palafox St., Pensacola, FL 32502, on Tuesday, April 5, 2022, at 9:00 AM, the Very Reverend Joseph Callipare, Celebrant. Inurnment followed at Barrancas National Cemetery with military honors being accorded by the US Marine Cops at 10:30am.

In lieu of flowers, please remember Covenant Hospice of Pensacola, the Pensacola Camellia Club or Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel Endowment Fund, P.O. Box 12423, Pensacola, FL 32591.

"Among the honors, postings, promotions, and medals that have been awarded me, the one in which I take most pride is to be able to say, 'I am a marine'."

Mr. William "Lee" Poe, Jr.

AIKEN - Mr. William "Lee" Poe, Jr., 94, beloved husband of Dorothy Logan "Dot" Poe, passed away peacefully Monday, January 17, 2022.

Funeral services were held at 11:00 AM Friday, January 21, 2022 at St. John's United Methodist Church with The Rev. Dr. W. Timothy McClendon and The Rev. Grayson "Butch" Blackwell officiating. The family received friends following the service in the church narthex. Interment with military honors followed in Aiken Memorial Gardens. Pallbearers were Colby Hozey and Robert Poe. Honorary pallbearers were Bob Prather and Jim Dickson.



Born in Birmingham, AL, Mr. Poe was the son of the late Evelyn Hoke and William Lee Poe, Sr. After graduating high school, he enlisted in the US Navy and served his country during WWII. Upon leaving the navy, Mr. Poe received a Bachelor of Science degree from Tulane University and then a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Alabama. In 1952 he and his wife Dot moved to Aiken to work for DuPont where he worked until his retirement.

Outside of work, Mr. Poe was very active in the community. He was a member of the Citizen's Advisory Board for SRS, the American Nuclear Society, past Chairman of the Park Commission for Aiken, I.T.R.C former member, and he and Dot were members of St. John's United Methodist Church.

Mr. Poe loved camellias and was very active in the Aiken Camellia Society, American Camellia Society, being an accredited judge, and a past President of the Atlantic Coast Camellia Society from 2004 — 2006. Lee was the 2010 recipient of the Atlantic Coast Camellia Society Award of Merit. He was chairman of the Aiken Camellia Show for a number of years and was considered the leading expert in the care and culture of camellias throughout the central Savannah River area and far beyond. Lee was the primary author of a book, *"Aiken County Camellia Cultivars"*, which pictorially illustrates all the seedlings registered in Aiken County.

In addition to his wife Dot, survivors include one daughter, Melanie Poe Hozey, Aiken; one son, William "Lee" (Janel) Poe III, Aiken; son-in-law, Walter Ice, Ashland, Alabama; four grandchildren, Robert Edward Lee Poe, Clark "Logan" Ice, Thomas "Colby" Poe Hozey, Kaitlan Elizabeth Hozey; one great-granddaughter, Ruth Estelle Ice, and a sister, Louise Poe Hairston, Birmingham, AL. He was preceded in death by a daughter, April Poe Ice and a brother, Michael Hoke Poe.

The Camellia Blooms of Fame Awards

By J. D. Thomerson

Hollywood seems to have more award shows than stars in the sky. They have the Academy Awards, Emmy Awards, The People's Choice Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Screen Actors Guild Awards, and even the TV Land Awards. I am probably leaving out many – I don't watch any of these shows. It "irks" me (is that a word) that our society devotes so much love and attention to these so called Hollywood movie stars.



The average hard working "Johnny or Sue" that works long and hard as a school teacher, construction worker, nurse, office worker, police officer, store clerk, restaurant worker, fireman, mechanic, and the list goes on and on do not get lavish award ceremonies every month heaping praise on their every move and action. In fact, the only attention most of these workers get is lots of complaints and fussing from the public when things don't go exactly as planned. Well, that is enough of my preaching about the upside down priorities of our crazy world – what could all of this possibly have to do with camellias.



Well, if Hollywood can give all kinds of awards to its celebrities I think we "camellians" can give awards for the various types of camellia blooms that we love. Yes, I know that the American Camellia Society has several award categories spotlighting certain types of camellias. There are yearly awards for the best miniature, reticulata, hybrid, sasanqua, seedling and sport, and a couple of others and this is great – but, I want to have a little fun and take these camellia awards to another level.

Hollywood gives awards for all kinds of crazy categories so I thought it might be fun to do something similar for our camellias. What follows is a Camellia Bloom of Fame Awards Ceremony that we will just have to imagine might be on TV one day.

There is nothing scientific or anything about the winners in my categories – just what popped in my head one day while drinking coffee at McDonalds. Have fun with this and feel free to scratch off a variety I gave an award to if you know of a better choice – there are no right and wrong choices with this awards ceremony.

Your host for this awards ceremony is the famous and good looking fan favorite J. D. Thomerson. OK – Here goes.

AWARD CATEGORIES AND NOMINEES

Best Christmas Flower: **Yuletide** and **Christmas Beauty**. How do you not go with **Yuletide** for this one especially since there are few other awards for sasanquas.

Best Early Blooming Flower: **Early Autumn**, **Kiku-Toji**, and **Brooke**. These are three of my favorites for sure. But, **Early Autumn** gets my vote.

Best Exciting New Reticulata: John Wang from Orinda, CA has many new exciting reticulata hybrids that are 50% - 75% japonica and 25% - 50% reticulata. Some of the best are white with various shades of light pink such as **Fine Pure**, **Holy Pure**, **Adoring Pure**, and **Evening Glow Pearl**. Take your pick of these for a sure fire winner.

Best Ginormous Bloom: **Hall's Pride Var.**, **Curtain Call**, and **Drama Girl**. Halls Pride can give me fits growing but is a gorgeous bloom. Drama Girl is an older japonica variety that can become a ginormous bush as well. Curtain Call is the seed parent for both the Jim and Elaine Smelley blooms so it is very deserving, but my vote goes to **Hall's Pride Var.** – the International Camellia Society states that this bloom can get up to 20 cm across and 11 cm deep and even though I don't know the metric system well I can promise you that is big.

Best Rootstock Camellia: **Kanjiro**, **Hongluzhen**, and **Kumagai Nagoya**. The sasanqua Kanjiro has probably held this award status for many years but once everyone gets a chance to use Kumagai Nagoya I think it will win over everyone. I understand the Chinese use Hongluzhen and Mark Crawford grows this one and it does grow very well but I just can't imagine that anything could be better than **Kumagai Nagoya**.



Early Autumn



Holy Pure



Hall's Pride Var.



Pink Perfection



Ville de Nantes

Favorite Bloom of Old Timers: **Pink Perfection**, **Mathotiana Rubra**, and **Alba Plena**. This award has to go to **Pink Perfection** – seems as though everyone remembers this variety growing in their grandmothers yard and the bloom as well as the old memories are special.

Must Have Award: All camellia junkies need at least one **Ville de Nantes**. It is not the easiest variety to grow or graft but it is just a must have and the more you get involved with camellias the more you will understand why. My friend Hulyn Smith had a gorgeous photo of a Ville de Nantes as his welcome screen on his phone and he would proudly show it off to everyone.

Best Reticulata: First by a mile for great growing outdoor reticulata goes to **Frank Houser**. I have heard many camellia growers tell novices that the first reticulata variety they should purchase is Frank Houser and the second is Frank Houser Var. Frank Houser is a cross of the reticulata Budda and Steve Blount (a japonica.) It can be successfully rooted and grown on its own roots and has fairly nice foliage and is not as leggy growing as most reticulatas. It is not immune to dieback but is much more so than most all other reticulatas.



Frank Houser Var

Best Fragrance: I typically can't smell anything on most so-called fragrant camellias but I can definitely smell the pleasant scent of **High Fragrance**. I am selecting this variety as the winner with no other choices because in addition to the nice fragrance it grows

really well (in fact, many growers use it as a rootstock plant) and it has a very nice mid-size bloom.

Most Overlooked Japonica: **Alda Boll, Oscar B. Elmer Var., and Ann Blair Brown Var.** I seldom see these varieties at shows and that is a shame because each is outstanding. **Oscar B. Elmer Var.** is my choice for this category – but, the others are great as well. However, as Randolph Maphis says, “You **Need** Oscar B. Elmer.”



Oscar B. Elmer Var.



Dick Hardison

Hardest to Grow (Non-Reticulata): Well, I could have many candidates for this category – but, perhaps it is more my fault than the camellia’s fault. I have just about given up on growing **Edna Bass** (I have killed three so far) but others tell me they have one and that theirs is growing great. I have had similar problems with the variety **Dick Hardison** but others do not. Perhaps I will try grafting both of these. So, what are my candidates for hardest to grow non-retic variety? Well, **Black Magic** and **Night Rider** come to my mind – why are the very dark red/black camellias so hard to grow. Since I don’t have either of these two you will have to ask others which is the hardest to grow. I plan to graft Night Rider this year so I may soon find out.

Hardest to Grow (Reticulata): Well, in general, all reticulata’s are hard to grow (Frank Houser, Ray Gentry, and a few others being somewhat the exception.) But, from personal experience as well as talking with other great growers I will put these on the list: **Pat Pinkerton, Dr. Dan Nathan Supreme, Big Apple Var., Tango,**



Pat Pinkerton

Grandandy and your choice of a multitude of other reticulata varieties. I actually have a Dr. Dan and a Big Apple that are alive so I am going to choose **Pat Pinkerton**. I think if someone even sneezed near Pat Pinkerton it would get sick and die within hours – but, oh my, if you can grow this one and get it to bloom it is a spectacular dark red beauty and all the others listed are amazing as well. But, I would not suggest any of the above for beginners or perhaps even intermediates.

Best Golden Stamens Award: Maroon and Gold

Best Formal Double Reticulata: Valentine Day



Maroon and Gold



Valentine Day

Best Seed Setting Japonica: Edna Campbell, Royal Velvet, Mrs. D. W. Davis, all the Tama varieties – a few years ago, several Edna Campbell seedlings were registered (Georgia Fire, Chief Arnold, Deep Purple Dream, Henry Parrish, and several others). More recently, Royal Velvet seedlings such as Mary Ann Lawrence (Steve and Gayle Lawrence), Cherries O’Toole (Tommy Weeks), Black Cherry and several others (Pat Johnson) are giving Edna Campbell a good race. But, I will stick with Edna Campbell on this one.



Edna Campbell Var.

Best Striped Reticulata: Open/No Award. Although a couple have been registered, I have not seen anything outstanding in this category. So, this would be something for future hybridizers to work towards.

Best Foilaged Bush: Georgia Fire

Best Mass Flowering Reticulata: Crimson Candles

Best Red Japonica: **Royal Velvet** nearly won the best seed setting japonica and it is still my wife Kay's favorite bloom of them all so I need to give it an award so it wins the Best Red Japonica award and it is certainly worthy.

Best Ornamental Species: Perhaps we could call this one the camellia that looks least like a camellia. My two candidates are **Camellia Handेलii** and **Camellia Yushienensis**. Both are very unique but **Camellia Handेलii** with small blooms all up and down the thin arching branches is so different. Even camellia folks will ask you what type of plant it is.

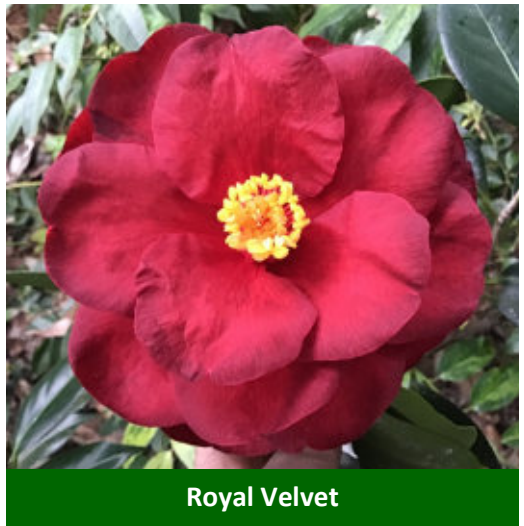
Most Shy Bloomer: I have to give this one to the variety named for my friend **Randolph Maphis**. Ask Randolph about this and he can explain and in the process have you laughing as well.

Best Pink Reticulata: **Linda Carol**

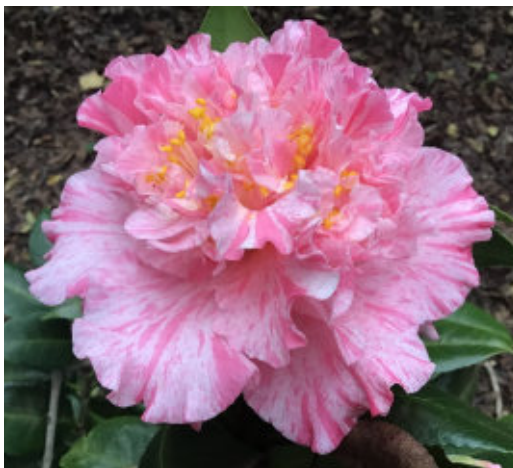
Hardest to Spell: **Mathotiana**

Best Variety to Give Someone as a Present: **Sweetie Pie** and **Happy Birthday**. I guess it depends on to whom you are giving the present and for what occasion but both of these are great camellias and both have great names.

Hulyn Smith's Favorite Award: Hulyn loved the retics and the bigger the better and the redder the better. The only thing he might have liked more was great variegation. Well, **Ray Gentry Var.** made Hulyn smile really big.



Royal Velvet



Happy Birthday



Ray Gentry Var



Margaret Davis



Tudor Baby Var

Best Uniquely Edged Petal Bloom: This is probably a category that is too broad. There are camellias that have fimbriated (toothed) edges or a picoteed (narrow colored) edges or wide white colored edges etc., Choices for this category would include varieties such as **Flowerwood** (fimbriated edge), **Tama Beauty** (wide white border), **Margaret Davis Picotee** and **Raspberry Ripple Picotee**. My choice goes to **Margaret Davis Picotee** but Raspberry Ripple Picotee is very special as well.

Best Small Japonica: Yes, the petals do shatter after blooming — and Yes, it blooms somewhat late season — and Yes, **Tudor Baby Var** still wins the best small japonica. It's so special it overcomes any bad traits.

Best Variegated Variety: Nothing excites serious camellia growers more than great variegation. Mark Crawford and I even discussed that a new camellia show award should be dedicated to the best variegated bloom. Some varieties just respond to the variegation virus more than others. There are too many good candidates to list for this award but Mark and I vote for **Magic City** as the best variegated variety. Please note, Ville de Nantes has already won another award.



Magic City

Best Sasanqua: Two sasanqua varieties really stand out to me – they are **Star Above Star** and **Leslie Ann**. Like a couple of other awards I can't pick one over the other I like them both so much.

Most Delicate: Show Time

Most Likely to Bullnose: Roberta Hardison

Dirty Britches Award: I pick **Mark Chason Var** the winner of this award. Hulyn Smith and others would say that camellias that showed some brown in their bloom buds before they opened had dirty britches. These blooms open and look great, they just look bad or dirty before they open.

Most Unstable or Likely to Revert its Color Pattern: All of the **Betty Sheffield** varieties.

Best Miniature: **Fircone Var**

Most Unusual: **Jennie J. Lewis**

Best Striped Bloom: My goodness I sure like the stripes and there are some great ones to choose from. **Herbert Earl Gatch, Lauren Tudor, Happy Birthday, Carter's Sunburst** and the list goes on. Happy Birthday and Lauren Tudor have won other awards so I am going to choose the new variety named **Ferris Wheel** for this award.



Ferris Wheel



Jennie J. Lewis

Best White Bloom: Unlike many “camellians” white blooms are not my favorite so I am not really sure which one is best. **Melissa Ann** still wins the most white awards and when it is right it is definitely hard to beat — but, for me it begrudgingly gives me those perfect blooms. I still have better success with the old white blooms of **Gus Menard** and **Dorothy Chester**. But, after seeing **Kirsti Leigh** and **Hallelujah** at some camellia shows I am liking the whites much more and planning to graft each of these this coming graft season. And finally, Jim Smelley says that his new white introduction he named **Kristen Lynn** is the best white of them all.

Best Very Dark Bloom: I think it looks somewhat fake (like it's a plastic bloom) and because of this it is not my favorite — but, I know I am in the minority opinion on this one so I will give way to the majority and choose **Black Magic** for this award.



Lauren Tudor



Bill Goertz Var

Most Noticeable Stamens: Happy Higo, Bill Goertz, and Drama Girl. Take a look at the photo above of **Bill Goertz Var**. – it gets my vote for this category.

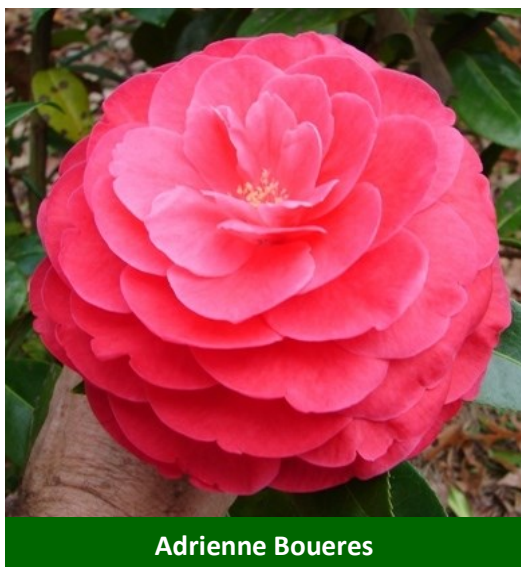
Best Very Large Japonica: As folks that compete in camellia shows know, there is not that many japonicas registered as only Very Large. There are loads listed as Large to Very Large but these are entered at the lower size of Large. **Paul Haskee Var.** wins a lot of very large awards but it is hard to grow for many of us. **Lauren Tudor** and its sports are my choice for this award and I consider it perhaps Hulyn Smith’s finest registration.

Best Small to Medium Non-Retic Hybrid: Spring Daze

Best Medium Reticulata: Lady Ruth Ritter, Elizabeth B. Hunt, and Adrienne Boueres. I like all three of these very much and Hulyn Smith registered two of them — but, the best growing one is **Adrienne Boueres** and it is also a beauty.



Spring Daze



Adrienne Boueres

Best Medium to Large Non-Retic Hybrid:

Julia and/or **Julie** **Var.** gets my vote for this category. I really can't tell the difference between the two of them but they are good ones.

Best Solid Pink Japonica: How do you pick one out of all the pink japonica's. Well, I will pick **Marie Crawford**. It is now registered as a large but with gib it is often very large and outstanding. It is named for my friend Mark Crawford's mother.

Best Frosted Reticulata: I saved perhaps the best award for last. I really like the reticulatas that show frosting. There are several and they are all really good - not necessarily easy to grow but really stunning. A few of the best ones are **Mandy Smith, Tony Pinheiro, Lee Roy Smith, Raspberry Glow, Dr. Dan Nathan Supreme** and **Walter Homeyer**. I will always remember seeing my first **Walter Homeyer** bloom in Hulyn Smith's greenhouse - and to this day it remains the most incredibly camellia bloom I have ever seen.

I know there are many more great varieties that did not win one of my Camellia Bloom of Fame Awards. I guess I will need to include them in another article for next year – maybe it could be called “**The Second Annual Camellia Bloom of Fame Awards.**” Even though I was pretty hard on the Hollywood movie stars earlier (especially all of the award ceremonies they put on TV) I must admit that I do like a



Julia



Walter Homeyer

couple of ways that they spotlight their celebrities. I think the Hollywood Walk of Fame (the stars in the sidewalk) and the footprints and handprints in wet cement outside of Grauman's Chinese Theatre are pretty cool. Maybe we “camellians” could come up with some type of similar idea along the paths and sidewalks at Masee Lane (check out the example to the left). It's just an idea, yea, I know, a pretty crazy one.



The Camellia Saga of Dr. James M. Habel, Jr.

A Growing Passion

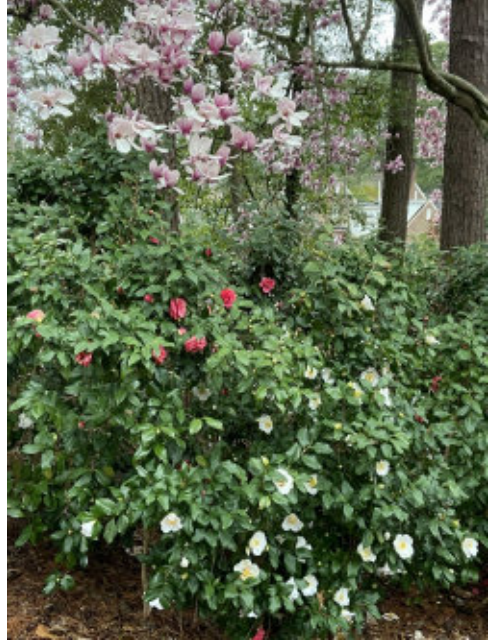
Part 1: Written by Shirley Brinkley — Reprinted from the Fall 1992 ACCS Journal
All Photos are Current (2021 — 2022) and Supplied by Amy Birdsong

More than 40 years ago (which would be 70 years from May 2022 — remember, this article was written in 1992), a friend of Dr. James M, Habel Jr, invited him to attend a camellia show. "What's a camellia?" the puzzled doctor asked his friend, "It's a flower," the friend replied. Little did the doctor realize that from this chance meeting a lifetime romance would grow. As a boy growing up in Amelia County, VA about 40 miles southwest of Richmond, Habel had little regard for any type of yard work. "My daddy was a fanatic on gardening," the 82-year-old Habel said, "I got several whippings because my brother and I were supposed to help keep the weeds out but we always wound up throwing dirt at each other."

Habel accepted his friend's invitation to visit the camellia show, unaware that he would be captivated by the beauty of the large, colorful blooms. "The 'Rosea Superba' set me up," Habel said. "It was a great big double red camellia and one of the prettiest ones of that variety I've ever seen. The next day I went out and bought a dozen, I couldn't get them fast enough or large enough, I was 'gung ho.'" So great was Habel's fascination that he joined the American Camellia Society that same day. His next priority was to find a lot large enough to build a home and provide plenty of "growing room" for his growing hobby, "We owned property, but realized that it wasn't going to be big enough," he said. After donning old clothes to tramp through a wooded area in Suffolk VA, Habel and his wife, Allie found the perfect spot on a large corner lot.

"When we moved here in 1950, there were no street lights, our street wasn't paved, and we felt like we were in the Dismal Swamp," Allie Habel said. Until Habel could prepare the back of his property for planting, he bought camellias and planted them temporarily in a friend's garden. "The lot was covered in kudzu vine and we had a time getting rid of it," Habel said. "It was a couple of years before we could plant anything."

Today (actually 1992), the couple's home faces Jones Street, while the property behind the house, extending to Dumville Avenue, is occupied by two greenhouses and about 800 varieties of camellia bushes that Habel has raised from seedlings. A tour of



Dr. Habel's Camellia Garden - Currently

the greenhouses revealed several camellia bushes that touched the ceiling. All were covered with blooms in various shades of red, pink, rose or white. Several were in variegated shades of pink and white or red and white, had ruffled petals, and were as large as saucers. Although camellias traditionally have no odor, Habel is raising a particular variety, "Cinnamon Cindy," which has a faint spicy fragrance."

Habel met his wife while attending medical school. They were married in 1937 and moved to Franklin, VA where Habel practiced medicine until he joined the Lakeview Clinic in 1940. In 1949, Habel was joined by a partner, Dr. William Rogers, and practiced as an obstetrician/gynecologist until his retirement on February 1, 1984.

"About the time my partner came in, I started my hobby," Habel said. "It was something I could do and still be on call." The Habel's have a son, James Habel III of Suffolk, VA and two daughters, Allie-Blue Everett and Betty Sue Green, both of Newport News, VA. There are also seven grandchildren. "Since 1950. I've promoted camellias and done a lot of work getting the names of varieties straight," said Habel, who is a past president of the American Camellia Society.



"Three friends and I compete against each other. You can hand pollinate the plants or leave it to the bees. It requires three to 20 years for a seedling to produce blooms and some never bloom," Habel said. "If the bloom is insignificant, I'll cut it off and graft it." In 1957, Habel planted a large seed crop that produced several new blooms.

An active hybridizer, Habel has named and registered many camellias in honor of family members and friends. A lovely pink and white bloom is named for Allie Habel. The 'Allie-Blue,' a light pink camellia with a white center, is named for one of the Habel daughters. Sue Green, the other daughter, also has a camellia named in her honor, while one is earmarked, but not yet registered, in honor of the Habels' 18-year-old granddaughter, Heather Green.



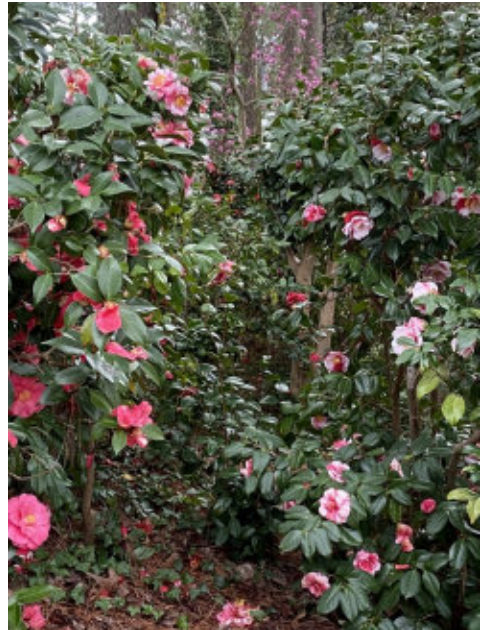
Allie Blue registered by Habel in 1964

"To name and register a new bloom, you must designate a propagator and the plant must have been exhibited in three shows," Habel said. "It must be presented to a board of the American Camellia Society along with several photographs. I send a cutting to the ACS and they have a committee that passes on the name and registers it," Habel said. "It used to take a long time, but recently I had two registered in two weeks."

While most camellias bloom from October through April, Habel applies gibberellic acid to stimulate the growth of flower buds on camellias in August and

advances the flowering time by several weeks. Twice a year, the Habel's visit the headquarters of the American Camellia Society in Fort Valley, GA. Its 150 acres boast camellia gardens, rose and Japanese gardens, and the headquarters building houses the finest porcelain collection in the world, Habel said.

Habel was recently preparing for a camellia show in Fayetteville, N. C. and had spent hours choosing, cutting, and packing the flowers for travel. Fifty flawless blooms were placed in small vials filled with a preservative, packed in cotton in styrofoam boxes, and stored in two refrigerators in the basement. "Before we had these, he used to take the food out of the refrigerator upstairs," Allie Habel said. Although propagating and raising camellias is time-consuming and requires patience, Habel heartily recommends it to garden enthusiasts. "It's an excellent hobby, although not many people get into it as much as I do," he said.



Editor's Note: Dr. Habel's camellia career includes the Bronze Plaque Award of the American Camellia Society as well as the offices of the Society's president, director of the ACS, director of ACS development fund, chairman of long range planning and advisory committees as well as being a strong and gracious supporter at the local and state level. Dr. James "Tubby" Habel Jr. died on Nov. 22, 1998 — he was 89 years old.

Part 2:

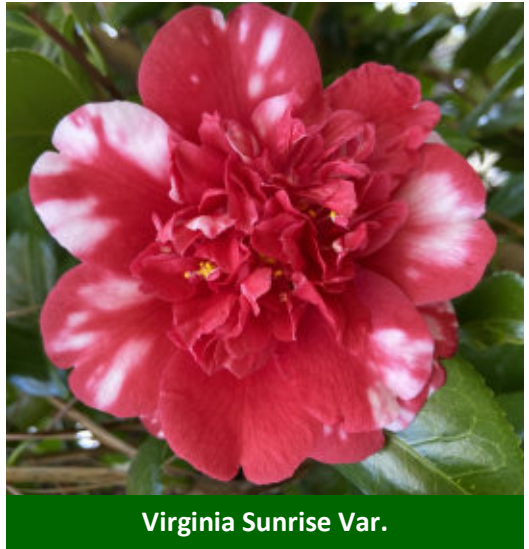
Historical Camellia Garden in Suffolk, Virginia

Caring For An Incredible Plant Collection - by Amy Birdsong

We are the third owners of a house built almost 70 years ago. Dr. James “Tubby” Habel Jr, who designed and built the house in 1954 with his wife, Allie, was an obstetrician by trade, but also a camellia propagator. Every part of the yard has camellias on top of camellias thanks to him.

My husband and I always appreciated the yard, but with busy lives, work and family, it was back of mind and mostly pure maintenance. Over the past year, that changed. First, on August 4, 2020, a tornado came through our neighborhood. We were fortunate to have little structural damage (several homes are still being rebuilt 11 months later), but we lost 11 trees, most of which were 75-150 feet tall.

One large pecan tree wiped out a 30'x18' border that had been full of camellias, trees, and azaleas and several other borders were severely altered. At first this was sad and disappointing, but after months and months of working to clean up and beginning the task of re-planting the areas destroyed, we came to be more intimately connected with the garden and its design.



Virginia Sunrise Var.



Ann Clayton Registered by Habel in 1980

Then in January 2021 I got a knock on my door. Bob Black, a camellia expert and VP of Horticulture at a large local nursery, was looking for a special camellia variety that he knew used to be in our yard and was asking if he could take a look around. As we trudged through the back hill filled with over a hundred or more camellias, hunting for something called ‘Virginia Sunrise’, Bob explained how he met Dr. Habel in the 80’s when first out of college and learned and worked with him on all things camellias.

He told me how Dr. Habel had been president of the Virginia Camellia Society



Junie Lancaster (reg. 1997 by Habel)



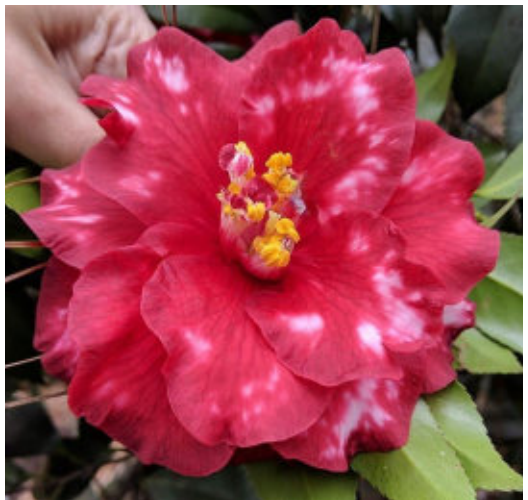
Les Marbury (reg. 1991 by Habel)

as well as the American Camellia Society and that he'd registered dozens of varieties that he'd bred. He walked me through the yard and pointed out some special varieties and answered my many questions on how to take better care of them. It was like a college course on the history of our yard and I was so happy and thankful that Bob came looking for Virginia Sunrise that day!

I don't know if it was due to Bob's history lesson, the extra rain we got in January, or if being home all the time due to the pandemic gave us the space to spend more time in the garden, but the camellias and the garden were like a magical forest this year, and my husband and I would walk around almost every day appreciating the amazing gift of this garden. When we were fully vaccinated our first trip was to see several historical camellia gardens. We have to say, Dr. Habel's just might be better.



Unknown Variety in the Habel Garden



**Tubby Habel (reg. 1997 by Habel)
Photo by Mike Chelednik**



Julie Leisenring sent the following photo with this note: Alvin Brown and Julie Leisenring are shown standing in front of a protected 90-year-old camellia of ‘**Captain Rawles.**’ Planted in a green house in the 1930s by Julie Andrews (Julia’s Grandmother). This ‘Captain Rawles’ is a *reticulata* which blooms in early April, thus hard to enter into shows. The photo was taken in October, 2021.

Short History of the ‘Captain Rawes’ Camellia

Captain Rawes was the first *Camellia reticulata* to be introduced to the west (Great Britain) in 1820, and is named for Captain Richard Rawes who commanded a British East India Company ship. He bought this camellia in Canton, the Chinese seaport probably from John Reeves, a collector of fine Chinese plants in the Canton area. Captain Rawes bought the plant to bring back to his friend Thomas Carey Palmer of Bromley, Kent to keep in his glasshouse — it bloomed six years later. The British botanist, John Lindley, later named it *Camellia reticulata*, differentiating it from the already known *Camellia Japonica*.

Over 100 years later in 1948, when Walter Lammerts and Ralph Peer both from California separately imported sets of 20 *reticulata* cultivars from China, the only existing *reticulata* they could find in California to verify the authenticity of his these new *reticulata* importations was a specimen of ‘Captain Rawes’ at the University of California Botanical Garden in Berkeley. That plant still exists in Berkeley, and

elsewhere, yet the cultivar died out in China. It was reintroduced to China in 1974, three centuries after its departure, and given the name 'Guixia' ('Returned Glory').

'Captain Rawes' is a beautiful carmine rose pink, very large semidouble, with irregular petals, large pointed leather-like leaves, heavily veined. It is a later bloomer in March and April. The Camellia Nomenclature lists it as a "hybrid reticulata of unknown parentage" with the Chinese name Guixia, meaning "Returning Cloud."

Source(s) of Above Information:

- *Pacific Horticulture* "A Fresh Look at Camellia Reticulata" by Tim Thibault
- *Garden Clinic: Camellia Reticulata*, March 18, 2021 by Linda Ross

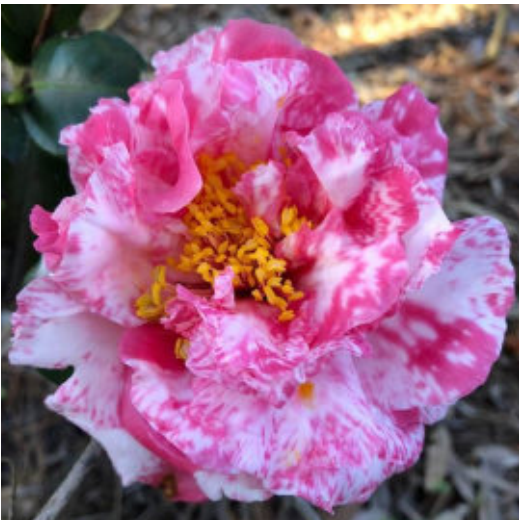
Don't Overlook These Camellias



Astra Nova



Cleve James Var



Vernon Howell Var



Leonne Summerson

GERBING CAMELLIA NURSERY AND GARDENS THEN AND NOW: PART 1 (THE HISTORY)

By J. D. Thomerson

When my dear friend Hulyn Smith passed away his daughters gave me all of his ACS Yearbooks and Journals as well as several other camellia books. Two of these books written by Mr. Gus Gerbing have always been among my most favored. Both are from the mid 40's and have many colored camellia prints of popular older camellia varieties being grown during that time (see photos at right). They also have detailed instructions from Mr. Gerbing on topics such as planting, rooting, grafting, fertilizing, and all matters dealing with growing camellias. By reading these books I learned that Gus Gerbing lived and ran a camellia nursery on Amelia Island, FL. Kay, Katie and I are very familiar with Amelia Island as it is home to our favorite quick beach getaway – Fernandina Beach. Often, after getting all the sun and heat we can handle we ride around and visit the other end of the island where there are very nice homes with beautiful large trees, landscaping, and yes camellias. I knew there had once been a Gerbing Camellia Nursery somewhere in this area but no idea about the exact location – we did know that it was a beautiful area.



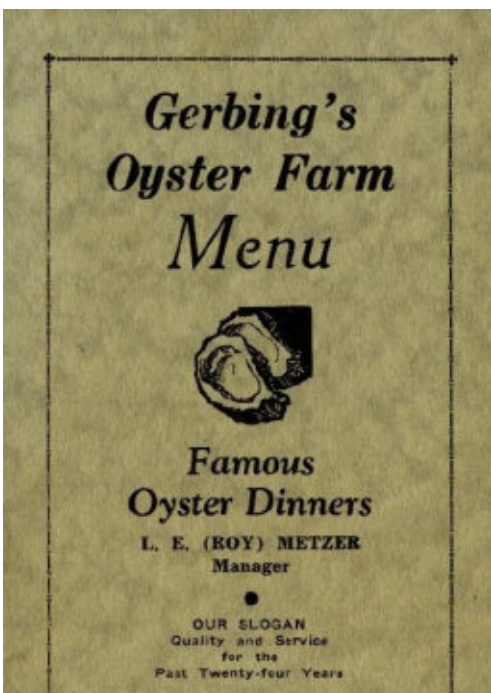
Fast forward to this past January, 2022 – My camellia buddy Mark Crawford calls and tells me we need to make a camellia “road trip” to the old Gerbing Camellia Nursery. He had called Gus Gerbing’s granddaughter Myra Gerbing and everything was set for a Sunday afternoon trip. Because I had read those old Gerbing Camellia books many times and had become fascinated with the old Gerbing Nursery on Amelia Island I told Mark I was eager to go. Well, a few days before our trip Mark begins to tell me the route we will take to get to Bickley, GA – I thought where the “heck” is Bickley, GA and why are we going there? Well, let me tell you why. But, before I do let me give you a quick history of Gus Gerbing, Gerbing Camellia Nursery, Gerbing Gardens, and lots more to get you up-to-date.

Gustav “Gus” Gerbing was born in 1900 in the town of Amelia City, FL on Amelia Island. This was before Amelia Island was a tourist destination. While a boy and teenager, Gus was all about hunting and fishing and enjoying the unspoiled beauty of the Amelia River and the Atlantic Ocean. Although Gus dropped out of school after the 6th grade, which he later said he regretted, as a young boy he was quite the entrepreneur. Before he was even 10 years old he started trapping raccoons and opossum. This was during a time when raccoon skins were all the rage and you could get \$7.50 to \$15.00 for a raccoon hide and he said “that was darn good money back then considering construction workers were making 10 cents per hour. Sometimes, I could make \$25 dollars a day, which was more than 2 ½ weeks wages.” Later, when he was 15 years old Gus states: “I remember well a young friend of mine and I with two cast nets in our boat caught 400 pounds of speckled trout in about four hours one night. This was about 1915 and wages were still around 10 cents per hour for skilled labor. We sold those trout for 5 cents per pound giving us both 10 dollars – we felt rich.”



Gus and Azilda Gerbing

At the early age of 19 Gus opened and ran a successful seafood restaurant for 12 years – he sold the restaurant in 1931. While running the restaurant he also was a commercial oysterman owning the Gerbing Oyster Company. Gerbing said the Amelia



River had the best shrimping and oystering anywhere and the quality and taste were unmatched. He tells how the “Otter Trawl Net” developed to catch shrimp by trolling soon became widespread in Fernandina. He said the entire riverfront was soon covered with 100 or more boats of all sizes trolling for shrimp. Shrimp packing houses began to line the harbor and it required 2000 people or more to handle the catches. During this period he saw solid Express Trains leaving Fernandina pulling 20 – 30 train car loads of fresh iced shrimp for the eastern and northern markets.

Unfortunately, after many bountiful years this began to change. Overfishing began to take its’ toll in the early 1930’s and the transformation of the island to a mill town caused great distress for Gerbing. He noted the environmental impact of millions

of gallons of industrial waste entering the rivers and ocean. Gerbing eventually sued one paper mill over the detrimental effects the pollution had on the oysters, shrimp, fish, and wildlife. He was an early environmentalist before that was a popular movement. He even helped start an oyster seeding project in Apalachicola, FL on the gulf coast to improve the oystering in that area. Due to these environmental issues, Gus eventually decided to change career paths.

Gus had begun a love for camellias in the early 1930's. In 1933 he began growing and selling camellias and started the Gerbing Camellia Nursery. He began with the common camellia varieties found throughout the

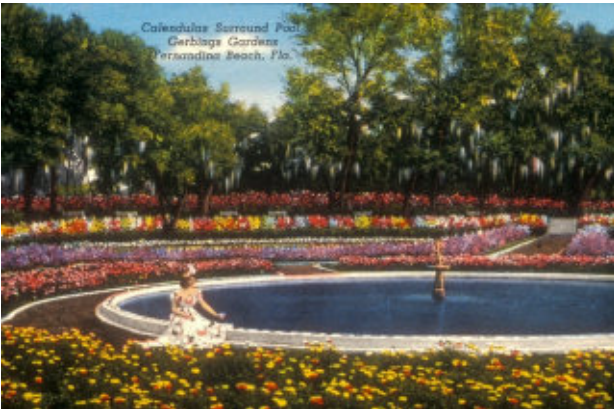
southeast but continually added varieties he discovered from all over the United States. He also started hybridizing his own camellias and eventually named at least 10 new varieties. He named one of his seedlings "Fernandina" and another one "Amelia" to honor his love for Amelia Island. He named a seedling "David Gerbing" for his 18 year old son that was tragically killed when he was electrocuted while working at a radio and TV service company. He also named the Bessie McArthur and Senator Duncan Fletcher



"Fernandina" reg. by Gerbing in 1944

camellias which can still be found in some older gardens today. By 1940 Gerbing Camellia Nursery was selling over 200 varieties of camellias. The demand for Gerbing's camellias was so great, plants were loaded on railroad cars and delivered nationwide.

Inspired by visiting Magnolia Gardens in South Carolina, Gus began transforming 15 acres of his family's property into a lush public garden along the Amelia River. Gerbing began this



One of Many Tourist Postcards of Gerbing Gardens

project in the early 1930's while also running the Gerbing Camellia Nursery. The property soon became filled with over 100,000 azaleas and camellias and many varieties of trees and flowers of all kinds. The property consisted of saw dust trails, sunken gardens, a terraced amphitheater, ponds, children playgrounds, 1,200 feet of concrete sea walls along the river covered in flowering vines, and a romantic rose garden that looked out on the Amelia River. Thousands of visitors toured the gardens every year enjoying many events such as Gerbing's Festival of Flowers which included crowning a Queen of a beauty pageant each year. On the grand opening the first year,

Rose Gardens, Gerbing's Gardens
Fernandina Beach, Fla.



Another Tourist Postcard of Gerbing Gardens

famed actress and fan dancer Sally Rand performed in front of hundreds in attendance. Gerbing Gardens was truly a grand tourist attraction for years during the 1930's and 40's.

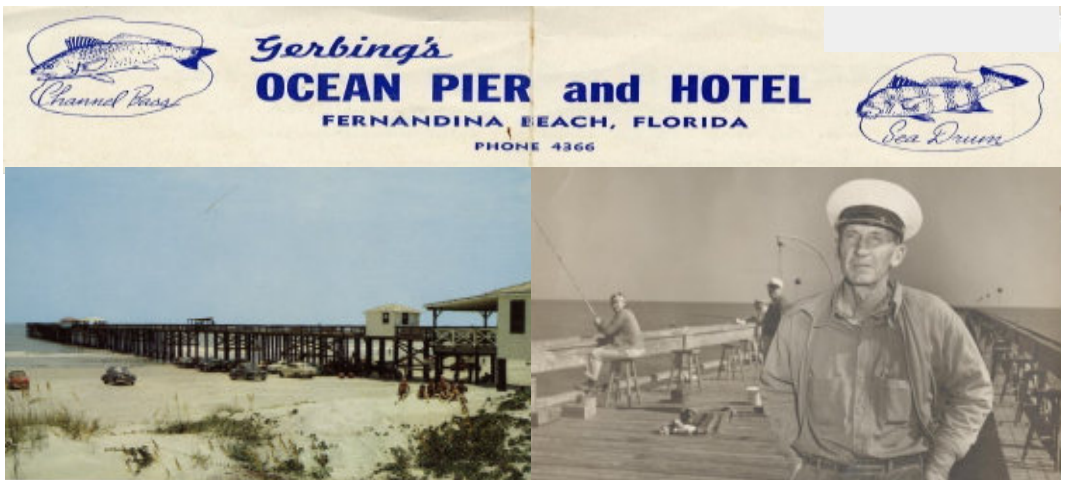
In 1944 Gus Gerbing wrote a note in the Gerbing Camellia Nursery Catalog stating that he had sold his camellia nursery to Mr. Ralph May, who had been working with Gerbing at the nursery for many years. Gus said

Ralph May would continue with the same company name and grow the same varieties in the same location and that he had asked Gerbing to continue to work in a Supervisory role, to which Gus agreed. In this same note, Gerbing stated that his future plans were to complete the development of his Gerbing Show Gardens and devote more time to experimentation, hybridizing, and collecting new and rare camellias which would later be available at the camellia nursery. Ralph May continued to run Gerbing Camellia Nursery for the next 30 years. Although beautiful, Gerbing Gardens was not a financial success and Gus closed the garden to the public around 1950. Gerbing states, "I put almost 1/4 million dollars into that park – but, then I found out that people just weren't willing to pay to see it."

In 1943, two years before the American Camellia Society was organized, Gerbing published the first comprehensive, all-color camellia book in America, titled simply "Camellias." The book included 100 colored plates of varieties that Gus himself grew. Interestingly, publishers would not even consider publishing the book stating that the cost of the color pictures at that time would make the book way too costly for people to buy. So, Gus went to the bank to borrow enough to make the first press run himself. The bank president said Gus had "gone off the deep end" thinking someone would actually buy a camellia book for 15 dollars! Gerbing explained to the bank president that people were paying \$25 to \$75 for some of his camellia plants (can you believe those prices back then) so why wouldn't they pay \$15 for a book that told you how to keep them alive. Gus got his bank loan and began with a press run of 3,000 books. This entire run was sold before it got off the presses and the same thing the



Color Print in book "Camellias by Gerbing"



next two press runs. The book was so successful Gus published a second Volume II book. The Gerbing books are still known as one of the best comprehensive references for growing camellias.

As had become a trend, instead of becoming a full time author and plant expert, Gerbing moved on to something else, which was a fishing pier. Yes, in 1944 Gus Gerbing built the first fishing pier on Amelia Island at Fernandina Beach. It was 1800 feet long and visitors had to pay admission to be admitted. It had a bait and tackle type store on the pier and Gerbing also operated a hotel right next to the pier. It was another tourist attraction for Amelia Island. There were postcards made advertising the Gerbing Ocean Pier and Hotel. Gerbing ran the Pier and Hotel until he sold them around 1953. Interestingly, Gerbing said the man he sold the pier to didn't maintain it very well, and later he burned it to collect the Insurance. Gerbing said "He let it burn for months when he could have put it out with a garden hose."

Gerbing's last innovative project was cultivating and raising shrimp in a small hatchery. Gustav George Gerbing, "Gus" to his many friends, died on January 25, 1984 at his home on Amelia Island. He was 84 years of age. Soon before his death Gerbing said during a moment of reflection: "Nearly everything I have ever built in my lifetime has been destroyed." His nursery and gardens were closed and his fishing pier was destroyed by fire. He continued, "The only thing no one will ever destroy is the camellia books which I wrote; that, no one will ever take from me."



The Light Grey Area Above the Square Lots are 3 Acres of the Restored Gerbing Gardens

Today, seven acres of the original Gerbing Camellia Gardens in Amelia City survive as one parcel – although, just a skeleton of what it used to be. In 2011, Florence Crowder representing the Great Gardens Preservation Alliance and members of the ICS and ACS visited these remaining acres and identified and labeled many of Gerbing's original plantings. Homes are being built and

sold around the existing garden with these homes having communal access to 3 acres of the original Gardens that have been restored and will be maintained.

REFERENCES: A Special Thank You to the **AMELIA ISLAND MUSEUM OF HISTORY** for supplying photos and much of the historical Information for Part 1 of this article.

GERBING CAMELLIA NURSERY AND GARDENS THEN AND NOW: PART 2 (THE REST OF THE STORY)

OK, all of the above history of Gus Gerbing Nursery and the Gerbing Gardens is just to get everyone up-to-speed for the “Rest of the Story” as Paul Harvey used to say. I began Part 1 of this article writing about Mark Crawford and me making a road trip to the Gerbing Camellia Nursery in Bickley, GA. But, nothing in the first part of the article say’s anything about Bickley, GA. Well, let me tell you about the Gerbing Camellia Garden in Bickley, GA.

George Charles Gerbing was born in Amelia City, FL in 1925 and was a son of Gus and Azilda Gerbing. As a young boy and teenager he helped his father work at Gerbing Camellia Nursery and the Gerbing Gardens. The day after George graduated from High



George Gerbing Property in Bickley, GA

School in 1943, he joined the Naval Air Corp to train as a fighter pilot in WWII. He served until the end of the war, which came just before he got his wings! He returned to Fernandina Beach after the War to discover that his father had sold the camellia nursery to Ralph May – it has been said by several older camellia growers and his granddaughter Myra that George was not very happy about the

sale. But, George did work with Ralph May at the Gerbing Camellia Nursery for two years before getting married to Louise Frier in 1948 and moving to Bickley, GA located 20 miles northwest of Waycross, GA. For those not familiar with this area of Georgia it is quite a remote location as Mark Crawford and I discovered when making our visit.

George and Louise Gerbing had one daughter they named Myra and two sons named Chuck and David. George worked as a farmer and also worked in the Ware County Assessor/Appraisers office. George did inherit his father’s love of camellias and having worked in the camellia nursery earlier he was very knowledgeable of growing and propagating camellias. As time permitted, George ran a camellia nursery called Gerbing Camellia Growers Nursery. He propagated most of his camellias by grafting select newer show winning varieties on sasanqua understock. His daughter Myra said he mainly ran his camellia nursery not so much as a money making business but as more of means to support his camellia hobby. He was known for giving many camellia

plants to friends and camellia enthusiast for free as well as planting and caring for a camellia garden at Epworth by the Sea located on Saint Simons Island, GA.

Over the 61 years that George lived in Bickley (he passed away in October, 2007) he planted over 900 camellias in the ground on the property and sold thousands of camellias to growers all across the southeast. Older camellia journals have marketing ads promoting the Gerbing Camellia Nursery operated by George. George, like his father Gus before him, also enjoyed growing seedling camellias. One of his seedlings that is still popular today was named for his friend "Bill Colsen." Another was named for his daughter "Myra Gerbing." Jim Campbell and Florence Crowder visited George Gerbing's camellia garden in 2021 and saw a bloom of the variety named "Myra Gerbing" and reported to Mark Crawford that it was outstanding. They said it was a very large, white with darker pink flecks, peony form bloom that was just beautiful. Well, of course Mark knew we needed to make a trip to see for ourselves and to get scions for grafting.

So, this past January on a beautiful Sunday afternoon Mark and I met Myra Gerbing at the Gerbing Garden in Bickley, GA for a personal tour of the existing camellia garden. Myra had recently moved back to Bickley to care for her mother that is 93 years old. In the past year, since moving back home, Myra has begun to restore the camellia garden that had become overgrown the past 20 years. Myra, Mark and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves exploring the 8 acre garden which overlooked a beautiful lake named Gerbin Lake – apparently whoever named the lake misspelled the Gerbings last name. The property contained many large oak trees, large overgrown azaleas in bloom, and hundreds maybe thousands of very large camellias.

It was so much fun to work our way through the vines and azalea thickets to discover beautiful camellia blooms such as various Elegans varieties, Betty Sheffield's, Tiffany's, Show Time's, Guilio Nuccio's, and others we knew with no need of seeing a tag. Many had tags but many others could not be found and we all tried to figure out the variety name. Many untagged camellias were beautiful



"Myra Gerbing" reg. by her Father George Gerbing in 1997



Unregistered Seedling of George Gerbing That will be Named "Nathan Gerbing"



Sasanqua Rootstock Plants Growing Through the Bottom of Pots



Mark Crawford Admiring the Beautiful Blooms at George Gerbings Garden

but Mark nor I had any idea what variety it might be – we took photos and scions of many of these. Most exciting to me was an obvious seedling of a Tama variety with the name “Nathan Gerbing” on the metal tag. Myra told us that Nathan was one of George’s grandchildren and she knew that George had planned to one day name this seedling for Nathan – but, just never got it done. Mark and I gathered many scions to graft and told Myra that we would register the variety with the name “Nathan Gerbing” once we had plants available. Also, there was a large camellia bush with the name “Epworth by the Sea” on the tag that Mark and I plan to research and propagate. Another metal tag on a pretty white bloom had the name “Azilda” on the tag – Azilda was Myra’s grandmother (Gus Gerbing’s wife) and it has not been registered.

Myra showed us the old barn and grounds where her father operated the Gerbing Camellia Nursery. It was interesting to see hundreds of large sasanqua camellias that were going to be used for grafting that were growing through the bottom of plastic pots -- they were huge. I also saw twenty or more named varieties of really good varieties in various locations that had grown through the bottom of their three gallon size plastic pots. I tried to pull up a couple of these named varieties but they were four or five or more feet tall and firmly rooted in the ground.

After over two hours of exploring the camellia garden I asked Myra as many questions as I could think of about her grandfather Gus Gerbing and the history of the Gerbing Camellia Nursery and Gardens. It is all just incredibly interesting to me as a camellia “junkie.” Myra said she has fond memories of visiting her Granny’s and Papa’s house in Amelia City. As a child Myra played in the gardens at her grandfather’s house – the gardens were no longer open to the public but were still incredibly beautiful she recalls. She described her grandfather as a very unique individual. He was small and wiry and often a bit gruff. He was very talkative and loved explaining his projects.

So in closing, the Gerbing Camellia Gardens are still alive and well. Hopefully, the remnant of the Gus Gerbing’s Camellia Gardens in Amelia City will be maintained and I am certain that Myra Gerbing and her brothers will continue to restore and maintain the George Gerbing Camellia Garden in Bickley, GA. I am so thankful that Mark Crawford called me and invited me to go on a “road trip” to visit a camellia garden in Bickley, GA even if I had no idea where or what he was talking about.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR SOILS PH?

Raising Tropical Fish and Growing Camellias in a Greenhouse -- Yes, There is a Connection

By J. D. Thomerson

Are there some subjects you hear a lot about but assume you know all you need or want to know about that topic? Well, soil pH was one of those topics for me. Oh, I actually did know a little about soil pH. I knew I lived in the southeast and our area of the country had acidic soil. I knew that the soil got acidic by all the decaying leaf and plant material. Out West where there are few trees and plants their soil is very alkaline. I also knew it had something to do with rocks and geology stuff but that was getting involved a bit too deep for me. I even knew that acid soil meant we had a lower level on the pH scale. I was happy that most plants I wanted to grow all stated they preferred a slightly acidic soil. I had no idea what my soil pH was but I knew it had to be acidic because most of these plants seem to do fairly well when I planted them in my yard. Also, all my hydrangeas bloomed dark blue so that meant I had acidic soil as well. So, I felt like I knew all I ever needed to know about soil pH.

I also knew much of this pH stuff because for years I had a sizable fish aquarium hobby and to keep the fish healthy you needed to keep the water at a neutral pH balance. Neutral on the pH fish scale test kit was 7.0 and if you did not clean and replace some of the water every month or so the water would begin to get more acidic as some food was not eaten and decayed. And, of course the food eaten by the fish was pooped out and led to the pH dropping down to unhealthy levels. If the pH got down into the acidic range below 6.0 it was time to clean and replace about 1/3 the water in the tank before you found your expensive tropical fish floating belly up. Like most places, the city water in Valdosta is quite alkaline – meaning a higher pH up around 8.0 or higher. So, when I replaced about 1/3 of the water in the slightly acidic fish tank with this fresh alkaline water from the city tap (after removing the chlorine) my fish tank water would return to the healthy neutral 7.0 pH and my fish were happy. Well, is this a camellia article or a tropical fish article?

For nearly 20 years I seemed to get along just fine growing camellias and other southern garden plants with this level of knowledge about soil pH. In all these years I never tried to adjust the pH of my soil and my plants did fine – most folks would comment that I had a beautiful yard full of all kinds of amazing plants. So, why am I

The PH Scale

The pH scale ranges from 1 to 14. It's a logarithmic scale, like the Richter scale to measure earthquakes. A soil with a pH of 6 is ten times more acidic than a soil with a pH of 7. Neutral pH is 7.0. A soil with a pH lower than 7 is an ***acidic soil***. A soil with pH higher than 7 is an ***alkaline soil***.

writing an article on the importance of soil pH? Well, my apparent good fortune with soil pH changed during 2019 – 2020 and no, it did not have anything to do with the Covid pandemic.

I had been growing nearly all my camellias outdoors in the ground up until year 2012 when I decided to buy a small 16 x 24 foot Atlas Greenhouse to try and grow some of those amazing reticulatas that I would see Randolph Maphis, Howard Rhodes, and other greenhouse growers bring to the camellia shows and “Wow” everyone. I had a nice collection of about 50 retic hybrids but I was growing them in pots and trying to cover them in all kinds of ways to protect them when the weather dipped into the lower 20’s which it typically had been doing for one or two nights the past several years. My retic plants handled these



J. D.’s Greenhouse Before Raised Beds

temps just fine but on many of them the buds (even the ones still not about to open) slowly turned brown and fell off. I learned that many (not all, there are many retics that handle cold weather better than others) dropped their buds in low 20 degree temps. Well, it is way too much work to graft these retics and keep them in pots to not get to enjoy the blooms every year so I decided I had to have a greenhouse. Just a side note on retics and cold temps – I am discovering that outdoor retics that are large and well established in the ground handle the cold temps much better than those being grown in pots. Reticulatas really want to become large trees and it is difficult for them to reach their full potential and keep them 100% happy in pots.

My greenhouse was built near several very large trees and the roots were so bad that I decided not to plant the camellias in the ground but keep them in the pots. Also, I knew that I could squeeze more plants in the small greenhouse if they were left in pots rather than planting in the ground. Oh my, after the first year blooming these retics in my new greenhouse I told everyone that those blooms for that one year were worth the cost of the greenhouse. I continued to get great blooms the second year these plants were in my greenhouse. But, during year three I began to see the plants decline and a couple of once nice ones died. Upon consultation with Randolph Maphis and Mark Crawford I learned that I needed to replace all the potting mix in my pots every three years or the mix would degrade and become soggy and unhealthy. So, I repotted all 50 plus of my greenhouse retics into various large 7 gallon and some even larger plastic pots. These retics had gotten quite large and it was difficult to handle getting them

removed from the old pot, removing old soil, and getting them placed into the new soil mix. And, after watering them they were quite heavy to move. But, gradually the plants began to improve and put out new growth and after a year I began to get some nice blooms again. Well, time marches on and fast forward two more years later and I begin to notice that my blooms would wilt and not be firm and perky. I would water and water these potted retics and think that I had watered them plenty but eventually discovered when removing one from the pot that they were totally root bound and they were being kept way too dry even though I watered them all the time. I realized that they needed an even larger pot and with fresh memories of how difficult the last repotting of these retics were I knew going larger was not a good option for me. I decided I must plant them in the ground.

So, after roto tilling and using a pick ax to remove an endless supply of tree roots I constructed 12 inch wood raised beds on both sides of a small center walkway down the middle of my greenhouse. I ordered a ton of good topsoil from a local supplier and used a wheelbarrow to maneuver all the soil from the dump location around all kinds of obstacles to the back of my yard where the greenhouse was located. I planned out the proper spacing and planted my best 32 large retics in my greenhouse. I got this all done over the winter months and around the first of March I gave the plants a good but slightly reduced amount of fertilizer using a quality 16-4-8 time released product. I used a reduced amount since they were recently transplanted from pot to raised bed. Well, I thought the plants would just love their new home in the raised bed and begin vigorous growth. A couple of months went by and they just sat there and did not grow an inch so I decided to add some more fertilizer thinking the first application was just too little. Well, two months later and they still had not grown any and what was worse is that they were getting a pale green coloration and just not looking healthy. I tried spraying some Chelated Iron that had worked in the past to darken up some pale green plants but that also did not help. Over the months I tried a couple of other products that I can't even remember now and they did not help either.

I was getting quite worried about the situation and began reading old camellia journal articles on fertilization and plant health. Some articles would discuss micronutrients and results caused by low or high levels of this or that nutrient. I studied charts with all kinds of diagrams of stuff that reminded me of when I was taking a chemistry class back in college. I somehow passed chemistry in college but never really understood much of it and many of these camellia articles reminded me of my college days being totally confused in chemistry class.

Too High or Too Low PH Causes Major Problems

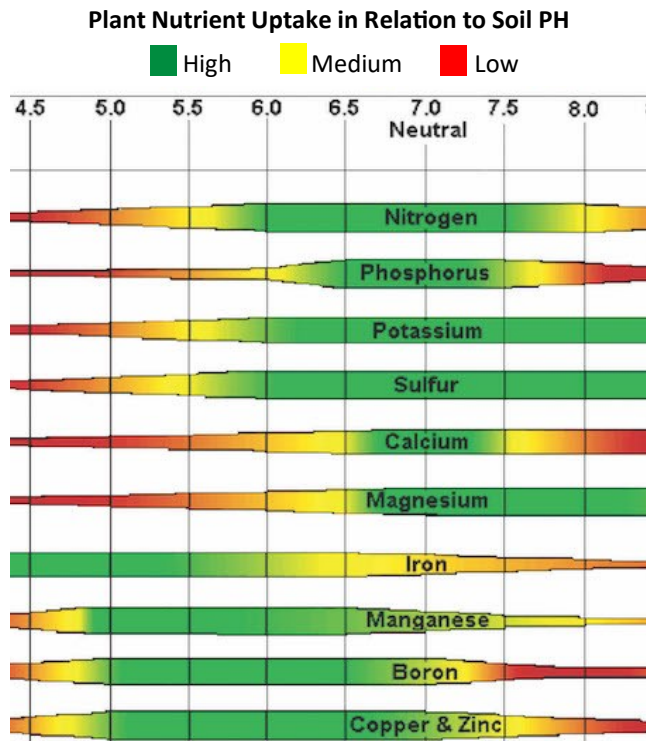
The major impact that extremes in pH have on plant growth is related to the availability of plant nutrients or the soil concentration of plant-toxic minerals. In highly acid soils, aluminum and manganese can become more available and more toxic to the plant. Also at low pH values, calcium, phosphorus and magnesium are less available to the plant. At pH values of 7.0 and above, phosphorus and most of the micronutrients become less available.

WHAT CAUSES ACIDIC SOIL?

- ⇒ The first, and most common, is simply that the organic matter and minerals that break down in soil over time are acidic in nature, and make the soil acidic. This is common in pine forests and peat bogs.
- ⇒ The second way soil becomes acidic is via leaching due to excessive rainfall or irrigation. Too much water results in key nutrients, such as potassium, magnesium, and calcium, being washed out (leached) from the soil. These elements all prevent soil from being acidic, so when they're leached out, the pH level of the soil starts to drop, resulting in acidic soil.
- ⇒ The third way soil becomes acidic is the use of high-nitrogen synthetic fertilizers. These fertilizers are usually ammonia-based, which increases soil acidity.

Finally, I began to notice that somewhere in the diagram or discussion of chemical stuff I did not fully understand I would see information or charts about the soil pH level. I studied more and finally realized that all the nutrients and chemistry stuff was all dependent upon the soils pH. Having always assumed my pH was about right for camellias I had just been ignoring all the info about the importance of knowing your soil pH. Finally, after exhausting pretty much all other options I decided that I would get a soil pH test of the topsoil in my greenhouse. I googled how to collect some small spoonful samples of soil from various spots in my greenhouse and took a small Ziploc baggy of soil to my Cooperative AG Office just a couple of miles from my house. For a whopping fee of only \$5.00 they helped me send off my soil samples to get analyzed. In about a week or two I got the results sent to my email. I did not understand everything on the report but I did see that my soil pH was 5.1 and I knew that this was pretty acidic. If my fish aquarium water ever got this low I would begin to see dying fish. I had learned from reading all the camellia articles that camellias preferred a pH around 6.0 to 6.5 and Mark Crawford confirmed this with me and said I needed to raise my soil pH.

Mark recommended that I buy pelletized dolomitic lime and



Increasing the Soil PH

If you need to increase the soil pH, you may use **lime** in the form of calcium carbonate or dolomite (calcium and magnesium carbonate). Most homeowners prefer the pelletized form of lime over agricultural limestone because it is easier to apply with spreaders. It is non-dusty and can be evenly distributed without being affected by wind. Charts are available with the various lime products showing how much lime is needed to raise soil pH by various amounts. If possible, apply lime before planting so you can thoroughly incorporate it and have time - several months - to increase the soil pH. Hydrated lime is not recommended because it can burn plants easily.

use the chart on the bag to determine how much to apply. He said that it would take several months to begin raising the pH and that I would probably need to do it again several months later. The bag detailed how adding so many pounds of lime would bring up the soil pH from current levels to the desired level. I decided to raise the pH up in small stages so as not to make a big mistake of some kind and after six months from the initial application I got a new soil test and my pH had gone up to 5.4 – not a huge difference but it was going in the right direction. I had more faith and trust now in this pelletized dolomitic lime so I gave my soil a second application and in the past six to eight months now see a marked improvement in my retic plants. They are getting a much better deep green leaf color and are putting out new healthier growth. Soon, I will do one more soil test to see my new pH level.

Decreasing the Soil PH

Soil pH can be lowered by half a point - from 7.0 to 6.5, for example - by increasing soil nitrogen. Adding compost, manure, or organic soil amendments like alfalfa meal to the soil can help drop pH over time by increasing bacterial populations. To lower soil pH by larger amounts (more than half a point), use **Elemental Sulfur**, sometimes called "Flowers of Sulfur".

Because the acidifying effect of sulfur depends on soil bacteria:

- The sulfur must be dispersed through the soil to be in contact with these bacteria. Make sure you mix the sulfur thoroughly into the soil. Otherwise, there will be strongly acidic areas around blobs of sulfur, and no effect elsewhere in the soil.
- Sulfur only works during the summer, when the soil is warm and bacterial activity is at its highest.
- Sulfur is not a quick-fix for changing soil pH. After application there is a delay of several weeks to several months before soil bacteria break down the sulfur to acidify the soil.

Benefits of Organic Matter in Soil

Adding organic matter is an indirect method of soil pH adjustment. Organic matter “buffers” soil, especially sandy soil. The higher the organic matter content of a soil, the more lime it takes to raise the soil pH 1 point, and the more sulfur it takes to lower the soil pH 1 point. Plants grown in soil with a lot of organic matter have healthier roots. They’re able to extract enough nutrients from the soil even when the pH isn’t optimal. In a healthy soil with adequate organic matter, changing soil pH may not be necessary, because plants continue to grow at pH levels that would stunt growth in leaner soils. When you increase soil organic matter, you’re not really changing soil pH, you’re increasing your plants’ tolerance for acidic or alkaline conditions.

Soil pH was the issue the entire time with my greenhouse soil. I had wasted much fertilizer and other products because I was hard headed and thought I knew everything I needed to know about soil pH and that even though it might be an important factor for some people in various locations my soil pH and that obtained from anywhere near Valdosta was just perfect for camellias. I have learned that many of the nutrients our camellias want and need cannot be taken up and used if the soil pH is not in the desired pH range. Many people are wasting lots of money on expensive fertilizer and the plants cannot use the fertilizer because the pH is wrong and the nutrients cannot be absorbed by the plant. If your camellias are growing and looking great then Yes, you can assume your pH is in the desired 6.0 – 6.5 range or at least close. But, if your plants are not growing well or looking good and you have followed the basic camellia planting guidelines then I recommend you get a soil test and learn your pH level. Otherwise, you are basically just shooting in the dark – or in other words, wasting time and money.

Note: This article specifically dealt with soil pH but a Soil Test reveals many more important details such as the amount of N – P – K and other nutrients in your existing soil. The soil analysis will help you target the right type of fertilizer to put on your plants. Here in Valdosta we have high levels of phosphorus in our natural soil and therefore we don’t need to add fertilizers with much phosphorus which is the middle number in the N – P – K formula you see on fertilizer products. Just because Dr. Camellia Expert in some other state or region used a particular fertilizer program does not mean it is at all appropriate for you. The soil in South Georgia where I live is very sandy and poor but only three to four hours north in places like Atlanta, Athens, and Augusta it is mainly red clay and nothing like Valdosta. Soil pH and fertilizer options are very different between these locations and a soil test will give you the information you need to make correct decisions about your camellias health.

References:

<https://www.grow-it-organically.com/changing-soil-ph.html>

https://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p2571_0.pdf

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/changing-the-ph-of-your-soil/>

ACCS STATE DIRECTORS

State	Name	Term
Florida	Chuck Ritter	2019-2022
Florida	Howard Rhodes	2019-2022
Georgia	John Newsome	2022-2023
Georgia	Sandra Jones	2022-2023
Maryland	Richard Mohr	2022-2023
North Carolina	John Fields	2022-2023
North Carolina	Bob Fox	2022-2023
South Carolina	Paul Cloessner	2019-2022
South Carolina	David Elliot	2019-2022
Virginia	Bob Black	2019-2022
Virginia	Toni McKenna	2019-2022
At Large	Jim Campbell	2019-2022

Join NOW! — The Atlantic Coast Camellia Society

A membership entitles you to a journal published in January, May, and September and full access to the ACCS Website.

To join, send your check and membership info below to:

**ACCS, Fred C. Jones
2056 Dunn Road
Moultrie, GA 31768**

Membership Form

ACCS Annual Dues, Good for 1 Year from Date of Payment

Single or Double \$25.00

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone # (include Area Code): _____

E-Mail: _____



Camellia Japonica 'Dancing Blaze'
Grown & Photographed by J. D. Thomerson