

**Diggin' In**

**A Guide To The Versatile, Colorful Camellia**

BY KATHY VAN MULLEKOM  
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Camellias are plants with benefits — they add pops of flower color in the winter garden and help feed pollinating insects that emerge on warm winter days.

"Camellias belong in the home landscape because they are attractive, evergreen shrubs that bloom in what most people consider the off season of fall and winter, some in spring," says Brian O'Neil, director of horticulture at Norfolk Botanical Garden in Norfolk, Virginia.

This time of year, garden staff offer guided walks through its camellia collection, which includes two major camellia species — the fall-flowering *C. sasanqua* and late-winter and early-spring blooming *C. japonica* — and the different types of flowers, such as double, anemone form, single, etc. Camellias are cold hardy in zones 7-9, and often to Zone 6b.

The botanical has more than 1,700 camellia plants in more than 1,100 different cultivars and species, including the tea camellia, *Camellia sinensis*, which is among the first camellias to bloom in October, according to O'Neil. The Hofheimer Camellia Garden was created in 1992 in memory of Alan and Aline Hofheimer, founding members of the Virginia Camellia Society.

"We have one of the largest collections of camellias in the southeastern USA," he says.

"It has been recognized as an official North American collection of Camellias by the North American Plant Collection Consortium. We have been honored as an International Camellia Society Garden of Excellence by the ICS."

What landscapers say "These long-lived, evergreen plants come in sizes ranging from dwarf plants that can be grown in pots, or larger thick-spreading varieties used as hedges and borders, or else grown as focal plants or into sizable trees. Some of my absolute favorites are *Camellia sasanqua* Yuletide — the red blossoms with yellow centers appear Thanksgiving through Christmas, when nothing else is in bloom. I also like *Camellia sasanqua* Bonanza, a low-growing reddish pink variety, and the spring-flowering



TOP: Tiny Princess (Andrew Andruczyk/TNS) MIDDLE LEFT: Lady Clare. (Andrew Andruczyk/TNS) MIDDLE RIGHT: Nuccio's Gem. (Allan Hull/TNS) BOTTOM: *Camellia sinensis*. (Norfolk Botanical Garden/TNS)

High Fragrance with pale pink peony-like flowers. Eric Bailey of Landscapes by Eric Bailey in Yorktown, Va.

"I love using camellias in the home landscape — especially the fall-blooming *sasanqua* since they are generally smaller plants, looser and more graceful than their bigger cousins, and they bloom at a time of year when most plants do not. Some of my favorites are *Shishi Gashira*, a low-spreading bright pink; *Bonanza*, often called red but it's closer to a dark pink; and especially whites like *Settsug-ekka*, a single white with crin-

kled petals and a yellow center and *Mine No Yuki*, a lovely low-spreading white.

"I sometimes use them as foundation plantings but think they are prettiest scattered along the edge of a natural wood line where their evergreen leaves add nice winter interest. — Peggy Krapf of Heart's Ease Landscape & Garden Design in Williamsburg, Virginia.

"Camellias are very long lived, and are adaptable to a wide range of lighting. They provide a stable backdrop when not in bloom. They have few pest problems, and with a

moderate growth rate require little pruning. Birds love to nest in them. Some of my favorite spring bloomers include *Les Marbury*, *Governor Mouton*, *Nuccio's Gem*, *Destiny* and *Junie Lancaster*. *Shi Shi Gashira*, *Bonanza*, *William Lanier Hunt*, and *Autumn Rocket* or *Moon* are fall bloomers which are also dwarfs in some fashion. Make room for camellias — they rarely disappoint, are trouble free, stable, and yet spectacular. — Allan Hull, landscaper and nursery manager at Peninsula Hardwood Mulch in Yorktown; Va.

What extension says Low maintenance plants with long bloom seasons (usually 2-3 months) in shade to part shade and well-drained acid soils, according to Andrew Andruczyk, horticultural Virginia Cooperative Extension agent in Chesapeake, Va., and a board member and former president of the Virginia Camellia Society.

"They can get scale insects if they are stressed by planting too deeply or drying out too often," he says

"Thinning branches can help make the plant less favorable for insects and easier to spray should any scale find your plants.

"Camellia flower blight can also become an issue — a fungal disease that only affects open flowers in the spring. Picking up and discarding infected blooms into the trash and remulching in late spring helps reduce further blight.

His favorite camellias include deep-pink *Lady Clare*, two-toned pink *Star Above Star*, deep-pink *Chansonette* and light-pink *Tiny Princess*.

**CAMELLIAS 101**

Here are some camellia tips from Andruczyk: Selection: Camellias grow into large plants, so give them plenty of room.

Care: Choose a planting site with at least afternoon shade, never full sun; under pine trees is ideal. Camellias also need good drainage and acidic soil. Give them a fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants when they finish blooming.

Pruning: Camellias are pruned immediately after they finish flowering. Prune to remove crossing and rubbing branches.

**Veteran Gardeners Find Inspiration In Midst Of Winter**

BY NINA KOZIOL  
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CHICAGO — Winter has settled in, and for many gardeners here and across the country, it's a time for quiet reflection before the flurry of spring activities. You may have stowed your trowel and packed up your pruners, but there are plenty of ways to get your quota of green. We talked to veteran gardeners and landscape professionals for their advice.

**EXPLORE A GARDEN'S WINTER BONES**

Winter is a time when Anne Roberts, president of Anne Roberts Gardens in Chicago, takes a short break from garden installations to muse over design ideas. "I go to the Chicago Botanic Garden for inspiration all year long but in the winter it's wonderful, too," Roberts says. "You can see the form of trees and large beds massed with plants. The Japanese Garden (there) has incredible forms in the winter." She also looks to the Internet and calls Houzz a wonderful resource of photos and inspiration. "It can be searched based on the type of home and landscape you are looking for," Roberts says. "Taking classes is another great way for homeowners to dream and design their landscapes during the winter."

**COZY UP WITH BOOKS**

Margaret Roach, the former garden editor at *Martha Stewart Living* magazine and an author of books and blogs (<http://www.awaytogarden.com>), hunkers down in her home in Columbia County, N.Y. "As experienced as I am at growing plants, I can't make roses or hydrangeas bloom in February," Roach says. "And frankly, that's good news. It would be exhausting to be bombarded by the spring or summer garden all year long." For Roach, winter offers an opportunity to delve into field guides in search of answers and a deeper connection to nature. She recommends Bernd Heinrich's "Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival" (Harper Perennial). "I have shelves full of field guides — to birds, yes, but also bees and beetles and dragonflies and moths and caterpillars and on and on. There's lots to learn. Now's a good time to hit the books."

**GARDEN-FRIENDLY LIBRARY**

When it comes to books, gardener Carol Balabanow of Bloomingdale, Ill., likes to curl up in the Sterling Morton Library at The Morton Arboretum in suburban Lisle, where she pages through stacks of garden magazines. "The library is very cozy and I can look out onto beautiful vistas to see what plants, trees or shrubs provide good winter interest. My other go-to resource online is Pinterest, which can lead you down all kinds of dazzling garden rabbit holes."



CHUCK BERMAN/ CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS  
A northern cardinal stands out in the starkness of a winter's day at Fullersburg Woods, where Zoel Zethmayr is reminded that "some plants still look beautiful when they're brown."

**CONSERVATORY CONNOISSEUR**

For some, there's nothing like the warm, moist air and the scent of soil in a conservatory during winter. Kevin Eberhard, horticultural superintendent at Bird Haven Greenhouse in suburban Joliet, gets to experience that every day at work. "Since I'm a grower, I'm surrounded by plants, including the spring annuals that we start in February in the greenhouse. But I go to the web for inspiration." One of his favorite sites is Proven Winners as well as those of other plant growers where he can peruse photos of their summer trial gardens, where plants are displayed and judged on their performance. You can also take an armchair tour of the trial gardens at Ball Seed Company in West Chicago, at <http://www.ballhort.com/GardensAt-Ball>.

**GREENHOUSE INVESTMENT**

Morgan Simmons of north suburban Evanston has eight decades of gardening experience and during winter, he spends time reflecting on his indoor garden. "Some 20-plus years ago I indulged myself in the expansion of a narrow porch into a small greenhouse," he said. "The expenditure has paid off handsomely, providing a sanctuary on the coldest winter days." Among the plants that bring promise of elegant blossoms are several camellias that connect him to his southern Alabama heritage. "A Meyer lemon also reminds me of happy times visiting family in California where it was purchased, and a cymbidium orchid rescued from (Chicago's) Fourth Presbyterian Church following an Easter Sunday display provides rejuvenating memories of my long association there," he says. "Each of these treasures, and many more, will be integrated in the outdoor garden come spring."

**FOREST REFLECTIONS**

For Noel Zethmayr, librarian at the west suburban LaGrange Public Library, a long walk in the forest is where she finds her garden muse. "I love to bundle up and get out to Fullersburg Woods in (suburban) Hinsdale just to remember that some plants still look beautiful when they're brown," Zethmayr says. "They provide such structure with their woody stems and lovely, useful seed heads." As the garden catalogs arrive, she also likes to relax with a few in hand and a pen to circle potential new plants and seeds, and to dog-ear the pages for future reference.

"My wintertime inspiration comes from morning walks with my dog, Max, followed by coffee in my breakfast room, which is filled with plants," says landscape architect Scott Mehauffey of south suburban Flossmoor. "Of course I love winter walks through The Morton Arboretum or Chicago Botanic Garden — and Garfield Park or Lincoln Park conservatories when I crave warm, moist air during our cold, dry winters."

**EASY INTROSPECTION**

Sometimes you don't have to go far for inspiration. With hundreds of hostas lying dormant in her frozen soil, Patricia Bailey of suburban Palos Park uses this as an opportunity to mull over her landscape. "It's a good time to stay in and be introspective and appreciate the stillness," she says. "But I love the garden in winter — taking photographs of the snow on the grasses and trees, or the sunrise with the light glistening on the snow." She notes that gardeners also need to unwind after the growing season dies down. "I'm watching footprints in the snow and having a fire with a glass of wine — spending time with my pets. The plants are resting and so should I."

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