

CAMELLIAS IN SAND DUNES

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SEVERAL years ago I became interested in camellias to such an extent that today my collection includes over 150 varieties—and of course the ever-present duplications. The first plantings were made at my home on Gonzales Street in Pensacola. I rapidly became such an enthusiast that my yard was soon full, and still I did not have enough camellias. Therefore, in 1936 I purchased Turner's Camp.

This property is located on the southern shore of Pensacola Bay in the section now known as Gulf Breeze. At the time, it was a dismal looking piece of deep white sand covered with large, beautiful oaks; but even then it was possible to visualize how it would look when planted with camellias. I was told by several of my friends that camellias would not do well in this bed of deep sand. They had not taken into consideration that the drainage and the fallen oak leaves, which had been filling the soil with humus for years, were just what a camellia thrives on.

A summer home was built on this property, and the house was finished in 1937. It was then that I started my camellia garden in the white sand dunes of Santa Rosa Peninsula. Year after year more camellias were added to the collection. However, I always made it a point not to purchase large plants, because experience had proved they would suffer a greater setback in transplanting than would the smaller ones. The camellias were from two to four feet high, and most of them were on their own root system. When I received a plant, a hole was dug twenty inches deep and four feet in diameter. An octagon-shaped cypress border was then made and put into the hole, leaving about two inches projecting above the ground. The planting-hole soil was prepared by mixing top soil, rotted oak leaves and barnyard manure. This prepared mix was then used to refill the hole up to where the ball of the plant would be a little above the level of the ground. After tamping this soil down well, the camellia was planted in its new home. If the plant came from a nursery having heavy soil, I washed most of the soil off the roots before planting.

Today—believe it or not—after only sixteen years, these plants are from eight to sixteen feet high and handsome specimens. They produce a bountiful crop of beautiful blooms every year. In fact, many times (I must modestly admit) the best flower of the Pensacola Camellia Show came from Turner's Camp. As many of my friends will state, we do manage to raise some of the largest and most richly colored blooms seen in this area.

I believe that one of the most important things in raising good camellias is to fertilize and water them properly. Let me repeat the latter, *water them*. The plants are fertilized twice each year—once in February with leaf mold and barnyard manure, and then again in July with a commercial fertilizer. The plants are watered at least once a week and in dry weather twice each week. One other important thing to my advantage is the excellent natural drainage. In this deep sand, it is impossible for a camellia to become waterlogged.

In 1942 I began planting seed from my own garden, and within the next three or four years I had about 250 seedlings. These plants, like their parents, grew to be veritable giants in a short time; at least most of them did. Some had leaves almost of magnolia-size. Strangely enough, though, several of these plants which had such beautiful foliage and grew so rapidly produced the usual small, single flower that was worthless in itself. Others, however, did produce some good flowers. The better ones were tagged and added to the collection, while the poorer ones were used as grafting stock for good varieties.

These seedlings began blooming in 1947, and a year later forty of them were moved into a new location of their own. Some of these have good blooms, and some have what I consider very good blooms. I have named only two of these seedlings—one for my daughter, Lucy Turner, and one for my late and beloved brother, Charles Turner, who died in 1945. Charlie and I were two of the seven men that originated the Men's Camellia Club of Escambia County, Florida, on November 23, 1937. He was a real lover of camellias and had many varieties in his yard. I feel that I owe much of my success in growing good camellias to his assistance and advice. I agreed with him completely when someone would ask him which was the prettiest camellia and he replied, "The one I looked at last."