



Camellia oleifera Tea-Oil Camellia¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Tea-Oil Camellia is so-named because they are cultivated in their native homeland of China specifically for the seeds, from which is extracted commercial tea oil (Fig. 1). This particular Camellia species looks much like *Camellia sasanqua* except the dark green, evergreen leaves are a bit larger, three to five inches long and two to three inches wide. Single, white, fragrant flowers are produced in late winter, and this large shrub or small tree will reach a height of 20 feet with thin, upright, multiple trunks and branches. The crown forms a rounded or oval vase with lower branches removed.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Camellia oleifera*

Pronunciation: kuh-MEEL-ee-uh oh-lee-IF-er-uh

Common name(s): Tea-Oil Camellia

Family: *Theaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

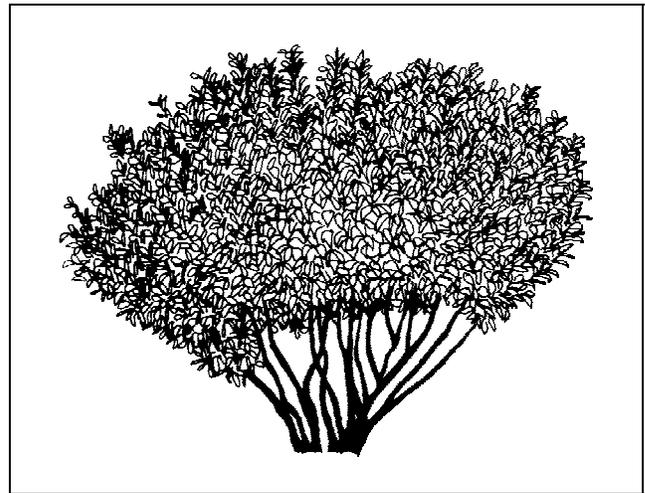


Figure 1. Middle-aged Tea-Oil Camellia.

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 20 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-116, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: oblanceolate; obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen;
evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: showy; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife;
inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter

problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline;
acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

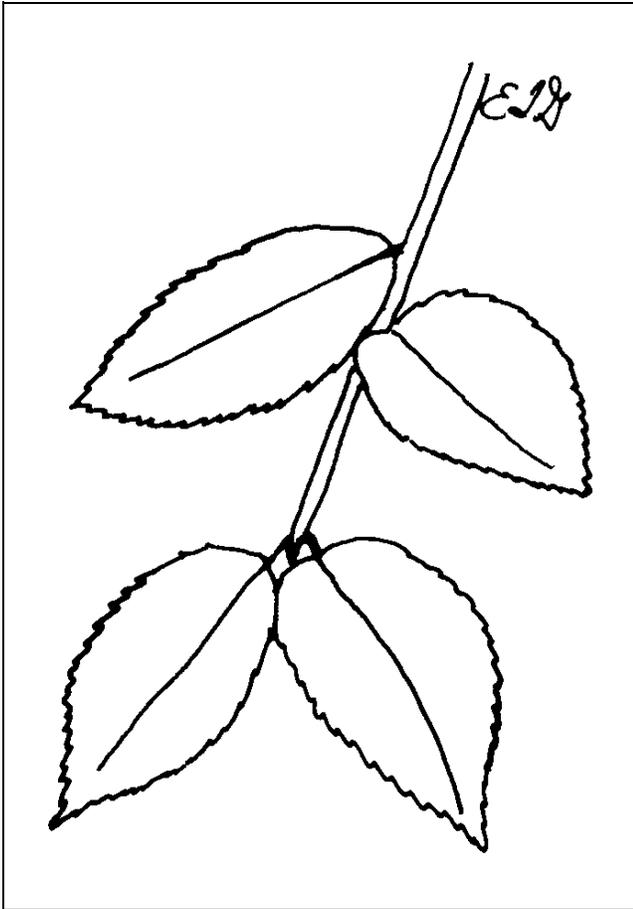


Figure 3. Foliage of Tea-Oil Camellia.

Tea-Oil Camellia should be grown in full sun or partial shade on rich, moist, acid soils. It will tolerate drought once established and grows well in clay soil.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests

Watch for scale infestation.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Plants should require little pruning and their dense, compact, crown makes them ideally suited for informal borders, specimens, accents, and sheared or natural hedges or screens. Large specimens may be trimmed to multi- or single-trunked small trees. This is a great tree for planting along a street beneath power lines since it will not require pruning by the utility company, but unfortunately it is not yet readily available. Nurseries should grow and market this plant in a multi-stemmed and single-trunked form for this purpose.