



**American Camellia Society**  
**Massee Lane Gardens**  
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**Press Release**

**February 1, 2019**

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## **2019 Festival of Camellias Celebrates Massee Lane Gardens' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Massee Lane Gardens celebrates a half century as one of the most prized camellia gardens in the nation, thanks to the generosity of Fort Valley, Georgia's David Coleman Strother, a founding member of the American Camellia Society. The central Georgia businessman guaranteed the future of the American Camellia Society when he deeded his private seven-acre camellia garden and adjoining 120 acres of farm land to become the Society's permanent headquarters a half century ago. The love and care Strother bestowed on the camellias he selected for his private garden transformed each one into an exquisite jewel. The treasures he planted in the 1930s are still a joy to contemplate.

The 2019 Festival of Camellias will showcase the history of the genus *Camellia*, the history of the American Camellia Society, and the history of Massee Lane Gardens during the camellia blooming season with a live camellia plant sale, special events, tours, and box lunches. A history exhibit and art work by local students will be on display throughout the season.

Located just a few miles south of Fort Valley, Georgia, Massee Lane Gardens is in full bloom in the cool months of the year, with the largest quantity of camellias in peak bloom during the month of February. Visit throughout the season to see all of the mid and late season varieties which will be blooming through late April 2019.

Massee Lane Gardens offers extended hours in February. The Gardens are open Mondays, in addition to the regular hours of Tuesday through Sunday. An easy to follow map of the 30-acre botanical garden and museum galleries allows guests to tour the seven specialty camellia gardens at their own pace. Peak blooming season kicks off with a celebration on Saturday, February 2, 2019. Admission will be free from 10:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and includes self-guided tours, a live camellia plant sale, free scavenger hunts with fun prizes for children, a camellia coloring activity, and a clay camellia-making art activity. A food truck will be offering lunch and snacks from 10:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Guests can enjoy buffalo, BBQ, or lemon pepper hot wings, pulled pork sandwiches, loaded fries, chili cheese fries and pulled pork sliders from Scott Boys BBQ.

A special Ikebana exhibition will be hosted by the Ikebana International Middle Georgia Chapter from February 1-3, 2019. Dee Boran of Bonaire, Georgia, a Master Instructor of the Ichiyo School of Ikebana, will exhibit a collection of Ikebana arrangements. Ikebana translates to "making flowers alive". It is the Japanese art of flower arrangement, and is also known as Kadō, which translates to the "way of flowers." Camellias are a popular subject for Ikebana arrangements because their flower forms range from intricate—with striking colors and petal patterns—to simple single forms, with five or six petals embracing a center mass of stamens.

Professionally guided tours can be scheduled for groups of ten or more Tuesday through Friday in January, and Monday through Friday in February for \$5 per person. Box lunches can

be ordered with February tours for \$15 per person (includes tour guide and lunch). Guests may pre-order sandwiches on artisanal bread with a choice of ham with lettuce and tomato, turkey with lettuce and tomato, chicken salad with lettuce and tomato, as well as vegetarian and gluten free options. Each lunch includes bag of chips, a pickle spear, a fresh fruit salad, a homemade cookie, and a chilled bottle of water. Lunch is served between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Tours can be scheduled either before or after the meal. Make your reservations early for the best scheduling options.

A complimentary tea tasting each Monday in February will showcase one of the most famous camellias in the world—the common tea plant is the species *camellia sinensis*. Guests can tour the gardens and then enjoy a specialty tea from the Masee Lane Gardens Gift Shop. Tea plants are also on sale so that you can start your own back yard tea garden. A presentation on Paulownia Tea will be delivered at 11:00 a.m. February 6, 2019 by Lubana Shahin, a biotechnology graduate research assistant at Fort Valley State University.

February 9, 2019 will be all about Art in the Gardens. A camellia painting class using the “One Stroke” oil painting technique will be taught at 11:00 a.m. by artist Shirley Rainwater of Lizella, Georgia. Rainwater holds a Level II Art Instruction Certification from Dewberry University in Orlando, Florida. She was taught by Donna Dewberry, who invented the one-stroke technique. Registration is \$35 and participants will complete an 11 x 14 canvas painting. Advance registration is required by January 31, 2019, which includes class supplies and garden admission.

Professional portrait art photographer and photojournalist, Judy Robinson, will lead a photography walk through the garden January 31, 2019 at 2:00 p.m. Robinson is the general manager and publisher of *The Leader Tribune* in Fort Valley, Georgia. She will give a brief introduction to basic outdoor photography principles, followed by a guided walk through the garden to take photographs. The class will be a fun opportunity for beginners as well as more advanced photographers. Guests can bring their choice of photographic device, from a simple cell phone to advanced digital cameras. There is no cost (beyond garden admission) for the class, but advance registration is required.

A camellia waxing demonstration will be conducted by Jo Ann Dankle of Fort Valley, Georgia at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, February 13, 2019. Dipping camellias in a wax and mineral oil mixture preserves the blooms for days (and sometimes weeks). It gives camellias from the garden a sheen that makes them look like perfect porcelain sculptures. Waxed blooms do not need a vase or water. They can be displayed on a plate, elegant bowl, or lined up on a table top. Many camellia lovers will wax their favorite camellias right before a freeze, or to prepare a large number of blooms for party decorations. The waxing demonstration is free with garden admission.

Saturday February 16, 2019 will continue celebrating the enjoyment of tea. Debbie Odom, co-owner of Tsubaki Tea, the CamelliaShop Nursery, and Gene’s Nursery of Savannah, Georgia, will give an informative presentation on growing your own tea—*Camellia sinensis*. Odom will answer questions about harvesting tea leaves and preparing them for brewing. There is no cost beyond admission for this program. At 2:00 p.m., Peach Palette Pottery of Perry, Georgia will host a mug painting class. Registration is \$30 and includes the mug, paint, and firing as well garden admission. Call (877) 422-6355 to make reservations and payment by February 15, 2019.

February 20, 2019 will be an educational day, chock full of camellia know how. Jim Pruckler, a retired Center for Disease Control microbiologist and Vice President of the North Georgia Camellia Society, will give a presentation highlighting the “New Grafted Camellias at Masee Lane Gardens.” Pruckler is an active volunteer at Masee Lane Gardens has been working on grafting important varieties onto existing large root stock in the species garden with

remarkable success. He travels extensively and collects scions from camellia plants in need of preservation. Pruckler has been helping re-introduce camellias to gardens including Woodlands Garden in Decatur, Georgia, Magnolia Plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as Masee Lane Gardens. Pruckler's workshop will help home gardeners who may wish to preserve a particular variety, or to use an existing plant as root stock for a new or more desirable variety. The workshop is free with garden admission.

Peach and Taylor County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, Jeff Cook, will follow at 1:00 p.m. with a presentation on soil sampling and site preparation for camellia gardens. Cook, of Butler, Georgia, holds a bachelor's degree in plant pathology and hosts a local cable show called "Backyard Basics", which features tips on topics such as pruning and planting. The quick quips that make the show stand out are what attract viewers of all ages. Cook's workshop is also free with garden admission.

The Middle Georgia Camellia Society and Flint Energies are hosting a competitively judged camellia show on February 23 and 24, 2019. Growers from all over the Southeast will bring thousands of camellia blooms to be judged by American Camellia Society accredited judges. A special novice show class is available for home gardeners to enter blooms and compete for prizes. There is no cost to enter blooms and experts are available to help identify and prepare blooms for entry. Bloom entry is from 7:30 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. The show opens to the public on Saturday from 1:00 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. and Sunday from 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m., and there is no cost to view the show.

Finally, on Saturday March 2, 2019, at 2:00 p.m, wind down with an hour and a half of yoga in the gardens. Nikki Hadbavny will provide mats and lead the class in the beautiful Fetterman Museum Gallery. The yoga class is free with garden admission.

Visit [www.americancamellias.com/news-events](http://www.americancamellias.com/news-events) and click Festival of Camellias to view and print a full schedule, reservation details and special event costs. Call (877) 422- 6355 toll free to make reservations for Garden Tours, Luncheons and Art Classes. Masee Lane Gardens is located seven miles south of Fort Valley, Georgia, off Georgia Highway 49, at 100 Masee Lane, Fort Valley, Georgia 31030. For questions, more information, and reservations, call (478) 967-2358 or email [ask@americancamellias.org](mailto:ask@americancamellias.org).

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Image Captions:

Shibori-egao: This *Camellia vernalis* is named 'Shibori-egao', which means "Variegated Smiling Face", and thrives in many different locations at Masee Lane Gardens. See this beautiful bloom and many others during the 2019 Festival of Camellias.



mlg cmyk: David Coleman Strother's private gardens at Masee Lane had become a shrine to "camelliaphiles" from all over the world by 1968. Even before he donated the gardens to the American Camellia Society, thousands of camellia lovers were making an annual winter pilgrimage to walk his brick pathways and admire his world famous camellia collection. Strother's camellia gardens still exhibit his unerring good taste and discriminating instinct for selecting worthy additions to



his collection. Many names occasionally been in the limelight in the Camellia World, but that of Strother will always be linked with the unforgettable legend of the Twentieth Century Camellia Renaissance in the United States.

high grafting: Jim Pruckler, Vice President of the North Georgia Camellia Society and active Masee Lane Gardens volunteer, has grafted many special camellia varieties onto large, old, established in-ground camellias that were sawed off to become root stock. Pruckler will give a presentation on high grafting techniques that he used in the camellia species garden at Masee Lane Gardens.



Quote about Strother, Source: Marguerite Smith, “An Appreciation to Dave C. Strother for Masee Lane”, American Camellia Yearbook, 1968.

“A great man is one who in the midst of the applauding crowd maintains perfect serenity, modesty, courtliness and generosity. Such a man is Dave C. Strother—friend, benefactor, guiding star for the great hosts of camellia lovers to whom he has given his most precious legacy—the very echo of his heart beat-Masee Lane. The lengthened shadow of Dave Strother stretches across continents, not only because he has loved the camellia but because he has loved the fine spirited friends that he has come to know through this Queen of the Garden. This love of camellias-this love between camellia lovers—has been a mutual affection. But no other one person has expressed this devotion with a material reflection that is not bound by time or space. The more noble and excellent the inner man the greater are his perceptions. The dream of the tomorrows at Masee Lane are no longer a mystery. Because of this gift the American Camellia Society now can foresee its destiny.”