

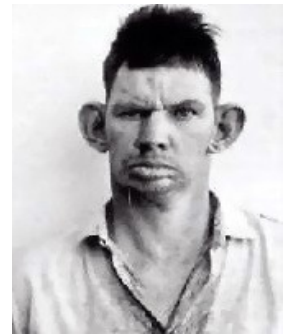
WHOSE POOR RELATION

(In Support of Sasanquas)

By Barry Johnson ©

Whittling Away

For many camellia lovers and in many cases camellia exhibitors, it's easy to regard Sasanqua camellias as the poor relations of the camellia world. Flowering early as they do, in April-May and consequently, prior to the serious camellia showing season, they are often relegated to co-habitat with the other general garden shrubbery. Similar to the daffodils and wattles being the harbingers of spring, sasanquas fanfare in each new camellia season.



The real poor relation

Sasanquas are the camellia cultivars that seriously outsell the fancy pants uptown ones that camellia exhibitors fight and salivate over. Importantly, most of sasanquas are readily available to the general public. This is something camellias 'snobs' forget about while chasing elusive scions and hounding other collectors into purchasing the rarer cultivars.



Espaliered sasanqua

Where would good landscapers be today without the sasanquas? Hedges of Photinias, Pittosporums and Viburnums ad nauseum. Sasanquas were also born to be espaliered, not whipped and tortured against the wall like many other unsuitable plants. They actually look great when most of the others are looking flogged to death from another Australian summer or, are pulling their scorched heads in for a winter's respite.

Origins.

So where did the Sasanqua story begin? Its typical and fitting that these flowers of elegant simplicity emanated from Japan. They originated in the 17th century (Edo Period) around the islands of the Ryukyu Archipelago and southern Kyushu and Shikoku provinces. Sasanquas in the wild can grow to 6-9 metres but, in cultivation, if left unpruned, generally reach about 4 metres. Sasanquas have also been used for oil, soap and dye production.



They have smaller more serrated leaves than most other camellia cultivars and are autumn bloomers. Most are scented and are very sun and cold hardy.

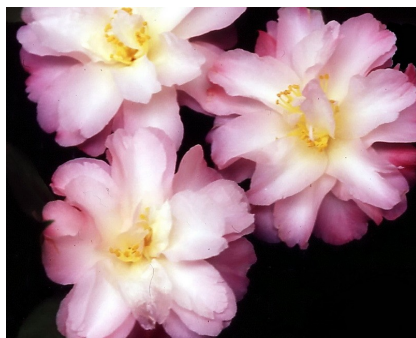
Don't Breath Out



Many sasanqua flowers shatter easily and an exhibitor needs a fast car, Valium and the hands of a neurosurgeon to stage many of them. "They can be messy" I hear the cry. I for one love the carpeting effect of the petals on the ground which, is more decorative than the big brown, moldy blooms of the later flowering cultivars. Mine-no-Yuki, Showa-no-Sakae and Fuji-no-Mine are some that come to mind. The sheer preponderance of blooms makes up for their shattering effect. If you'd like your sasanqua flowers to hold a bit longer go for fuller petaled types such as, Star Above Star, Early Pearly, Chansonette, Asakura, Paradise Pearl, Paradise Hilda, Jean May, Pure Silk, Edna Butler, Lucinda, Bonanza, Sparkling Burgundy and Marge Miller.



Early Pearly



Star Above Star



Bonanza



Showa-no-Sakae



Lucinda



Asakura

Spit & Polish

I've heard it said, "They smell like shoe polish" Having **not** spent my formative years sniffing things, especially not boot polish, I beg to differ. I love the heady perfume of the sasanqua flowers in the dense autumnal airs especially after a summer of sweaty armpits.

Playing Favourites

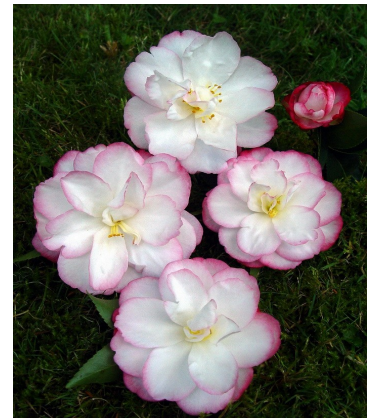
Apart from all the ones I've already mentioned, I would have to throw in Yuletide, Hiryu (Syn. Kanjiro), Bert Jones, Setsugekka, Star Above Star, Dazzler, Mignonne, Paradise Blush, Paradise Sayaka, Paradise Little Liane, Cherilyn, Cleopatra, Egao, Red Willow, Something Special, Lucinda, Little Pearl, Ginryu, Slim N Trim and Bonsai Baby.



Paradise Sayaka



Hiryu



Paradise Blush



Something Special



Bonsai Baby



Yuletide

Sassy & Stylistic

If your looking for a versatile camellia cultivar look no further than sasanquas. They look great as a hedge; espaliered, cascading over rockeries, bonsa-ied, potted or as garden specimens. I better throw in cool as well.