



TWO HIGO STORIES

Origins & Development

(By Franco Ghirardi – Italy)



The Camellia belongs to the Theaceae family and Linneus gave the common name "Camellia Japonica" to this group, with reference to its homeland. As far as Japan is concerned, the most representative Camellia is called Higo, a mixture of culture and mystery surrounded by great charm. Luckily, this variety of Camellia was saved by an association of flower growers, called Hana Ren, and later it was able to survive any world war damages. Its name comes from ancient homeland, today called Kumamoto, where it was selected and cultivated in the age of the Samurais. The most important duty of the Samurai was the complete devotion to his master and respect for parents and ancestors. The example of this was the practise of planting the dead relative's favourite Camellia in the family cemetery: in this way fidelity and respect to both ancestors and Camellias was achieved. Around the second half of the XIX century, the political system in Japan changed and the Samurais were disarmed; consequently many of their traditions were lost and the Camellias were forgotten. The Hana Ren and the Higo Camellia Society later tried to hand down this incredible cultural heritage.

The Camellia Higo does not resemble any natural species as it is a hybrid of selected varieties of Camellia Japonica and the little known Camellia Rusticana of the Honsu mountains, as well as other varieties. The Higo may be considered a style of flower more than a species; its greatest features are a profusion of stamens and a simple flat flower. It has 5 to 9 very large and iridescent petals and from 100 to 250 stamens in each flower .The stamens can be white, yellow, pink or reddish, in this way they stand out against the overall colour of the flower which is generally clear and brilliant and it may be white, pink, scarlet or cream, often with contrasting stripes.



Famous Mt. Fuji-Honshu Mountains



Higo bonsai

Because of its unknown origins, there is no reason to be surprised at its unusual characteristic change, for example many of them are scented. The Camellia growers of Kumamoto are also very skilfull in the growing of Bonsai. These are very small plants cultivated in vases which generally seem to be very old, and in fact some really are. They are achieved by inserting a young branch (any variety can be used) into an old trunk or a root, generally taken from rocks in the mountains. Under no circumstances can any description communicate the right spirit of the Higo that can only be reached through its sight and its possession. In any case, no written

description is able to do justice to the spirit of this flower. It must be seen or, better yet possessed to be fully appreciated.

Ghirardi References

Higo Camellia <page2.html> | Il Giardino delle Higo <page3.html> | The Higo Garden <page4.html> | Higo: Le Antiche Camellie dei Samurai <page5.html> | Higo: The Ancient Camellias of The Samurais <page6.html> | Il Libro -- The Book <page7.html>

An Australian Higo Perspective

(By Barry Di Salvia – Narrandera- New South Wales - Australia)

Higo is a name given to a particular style of japonica camellia which has originated from the Higo province (now known as the Kumamoto prefecture) in Japan. Some experts believe them to have come from a deliberate cross between *C. japonica* and *C. rusticana*. True Higo camellias must be registered under the strict criteria of the Higo Camellia Society.

To register a new variety, the 5 member Higo Society Registration Committee observes it for five years to see the stability of the flower pattern, and there must be more than 100 plants available for sale at the time of registration.



Higo - Yamato Nishiki

A Higo bloom is usually a single with 5 to 9 petals and is flat or slightly saucer shaped. There is often a distinctly triangular shape to the bloom. While there is a full range of colours—whites, pinks, reds and brocades with their stripes and spots—pureness of colour is always demanded. Higo camellias have 100 to 300 yellow, white or pink stamens arranged, according to the variety, in one of two special ways—Ume-jin or Wa-jin. In both systems there is an outer ring (annulus) of stamens and the more stamens they have the more the variety is valued. The Japanese names given to Higos generally have interesting English translations—Yamato Nishiki translates as Supreme Brocade Silk Woven in Japan.

The Japanese name for the apricot “*Prunus mume*” is “Ume”. The Ume-jin arrangement of Higo stamens is similar to that of a bloom of this apricot, in which they separately flair out in the centre like a sunburst, with some stamens closer to the carpel (pistil). The Wa-jin arrangement has the stamens fused for a distance from the centre, which is then hollow. Wa-jin is regarded by some as intermediate between the original tubular stamen system and that of the Ume-jin system which is more valued in Higos. The ancient Yamato Nishiki and also Jitsugetsusei display the Ume-jin system, while Reiho and Showano-hikari have the Wa-jin Arrangement.



Prunus Mume (Apricot)

New Higos are still being produced. Tomoya Nishimura (now 88 years old), in 1999 registered four new cultivars, one being a sport of Yamato Nishiki.



Japanese Garden-Cowra

Higos appear to be slowly becoming more popular in Australia, but are not easy to obtain unless you live close to Berry in NSW. (the late) Terry Pierson had the the best collection of Higos in Australia (and beyond) and encouraged his local nursery to propagate many varieties. Terry also supported the Cowra Japanese Garden in their establishment of a Higo collection which he donated to them. Most of the photos are of blooms from Terry's extensive collection at Mildorrie.

At Hume's camellia show the single japonicas have been divided into "HIGO STYLE" and "Others". The description of "Higo Style" has been given to blooms which have the form of a Higo, but have not originated in Kumamoto. Jim Powell's Michelle Ford:, Nuccio's Happy Higo, Adelina Patty, Sassfras Zoe, Adelina Sargent, and even some reticulatas Ruby Girl and Red Crystal can be of Higo Style, but true Higos only come from Higo Country and have been registered by the Higo Society.

Di Salvia References

[The information in this article has been gleaned from several sources: "Higo Camellia...", Franco Ghirardi; "the Higo Camellia", an adaption of a lecture given to the Spanish Camellia Society by Shigeo Matsumoto found on ICS Website; "What Camellia is That?", Stirling Macaboy; "The Ancient Camellias of Samurais", <www.higocamellia.it/page6.html> .
Barry Di Salvia - Hume Newsletter April 2008

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