

# News from the Tea Gardens At Camellia Forest

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Spring is about to...spring! Wait, it is already partially sprung. No, wait, what's this – winter again? Snowflakes falling just a week after we hit 80 degrees? Here in the Piedmont region of North Carolina we have several stages of spring that pop-up suddenly and then regress, until eventually the progress towards warmth and growth in the garden can no longer be contained. With luck we'll be spared the late frosts this year, as the first flush is just around the corner!

NEW - this spring we are so excited to be able to announce a new class, Tea 101 (Intro to Tea), offered at the gardens by Danielle Hochstetter in May and June. See a full description on Page 2. Also, after posting our workshop dates for the summer, we are amazed to find that the first classes in June are nearly sold out – if you think you want to join us for one of the tours or workshops, please sign-up soon, or sign-up for the waitlist. Last, but not least, we look forward to seeing you at our First Flush Fest – come visit, taste our fresh teas, and see what's been happening in the gardens.

With best wishes for a wonderful spring,  
Christine

Spring 2022



## Workshops

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### [INTRO TO THE TEA GARDEN](#)

Saturdays, 2-4pm

June 11, June 25, July 9, July 23

### [HARVEST AND PROCESS](#)

Sundays, 10am-3pm

June 12, June 26, July 10, July 24

### [TEA 101: INTRO TO TEA](#)

Saturdays, 2-4pm

May 14, June 18

## Events

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### [FIRST FLUSH FEST](#)

Sunday, May 29

10am-4pm

## Camellia Forest

### Nursery & Tea Gardens

620 NC Highway 54 West;

Chapel Hill, NC 27516

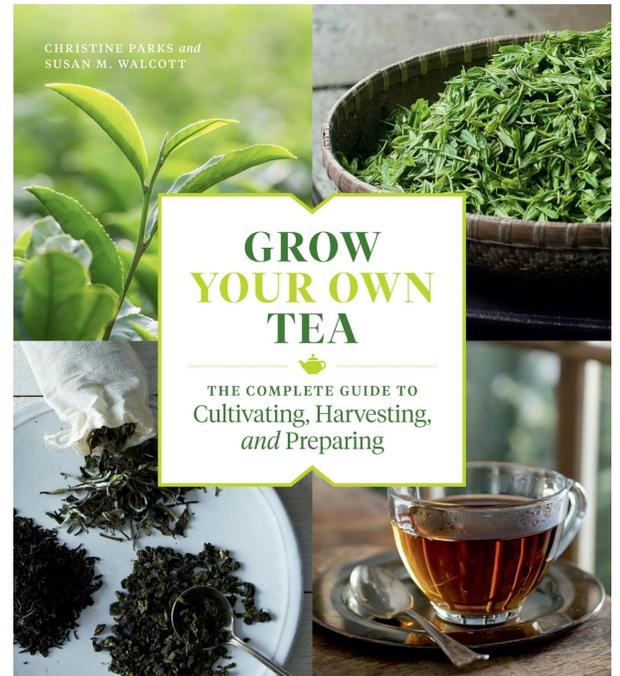
Contact us: [teaflowergardens@gmail.com](mailto:teaflowergardens@gmail.com)

## Tea 101

We are honored to be able to partner with Danielle Hochstetter, a real expert in tea (the drink), who will give this class nestled among our tea gardens at Camellia Forest. Ever wondered what the big deal is about tea? What is the difference between green, black, and earl grey, anyway? Why is green tea always bitter? What did the Chinese think of us throwing all their tea in the Boston Harbor? Danielle can answer all these questions and more, since she went and got a graduate degree in tea science in China! Come learn about how great teas are made, the fascinating history of the most popular beverage in the world, and taste great tea all while doing it! She will prepare 5-6 teas that will elevate your palate and take you on a world tour of tea origins including a walk through the gardens to introduce the basics of *Camellia sinensis* plant.

Each class will be an intimate event, with a maximum of 5 guests for \$25/per person, and lasting about 90 minutes with an optional 30-minute walk and talk with Christine or Sandy, who will be nearby working in the gardens. If demand is high, we will consider adding more dates or a few additional guests. Sign up through the [nursery website](#).

## GROW YOUR OWN TEA



After 5 years of planning, research, and writing we're still celebrating! Published in 2020, we are honored that booklist named it "the guide of guides to growing tea." [Available at Camellia Forest](#) (signed copies by request/at in-person events)

## SPEAKING OF TEA

We love spreading the word about growing local tea. Last month, I had a great time preparing and talking about tea gardening with the [Herb Society of America](#). In researching their organization, I discovered a great "Herb of the month" feature on *Camellia sinensis* from June 2021. They've got a really impressive educational mission and opportunities – check them out!

As we head into the busy spring and summer harvest season, we'll be spending most of our time talking to the tea plants, volunteers, students, and visitors.

## What's been happening in the gardens?

Despite our best intentions to hold off planting more tea, we've given in to our impulses and are starting planting our new "forest tea garden" as well as adding another partially shaded row to our "tea and flower garden." Some of the plants under shade are unique crosses, including *camellia sinensis* var *sinensis* "Fui" (zone 7b-9) and *camellia taliensis* (also known as Dali or wild tea, from Yunnan – zone 7b-8). For these we seek the shelter of the trees to create a microclimate with a little less heat loss and greater protection from the coldest winter mornings.

For gardening tips and more stories from the gardens, see page 4.

## Tea Garden Visitors

Recently we had the opportunity to host [World Tea Association](#), a student organization at Wake Forest University. The group spent the afternoon with us sipping tea at the shady grove and touring the tea gardens. William Liu, President of World Tea Association, started the group in 2020 with a mission to bring people together through tea. On a regular basis they meet outdoors for small group discussion-based tea sessions. They assign a "brewer" who introduces the tea and prepares it, usually gongfu style or Japanese tea preparation. The brewer leads conversation in a free-flowing nature, ranging from current news, philosophy, to sharing their week.



photo from @worldteawfu on Instagram

Speaking with William, we admire his sentiments on tea and community. He said, "Tea fosters a sense of community because tea by nature brings us to the presence." As they share and introduce teas, "the process of brewing requires time and attention to fully appreciate the essence of it. And sharing this experience with others requires everyone at the table to also be fully present. This results in in-depth conversations where attendees are really able to connect with each other while enjoying continuous steeping of tea outside in nature."

“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.

— Gertrude Jekyll

## Tea Garden Tips – Spring

*preparing for growth and harvest*

The quote above pretty much says it all – patience, industry, and trust. Tea plants can look pretty rough after the winter and pruning, so for me it is all about trust. When the plants start growing (about mid-April here), they will soon look bright with the new green growth.

If you haven't already fertilized in late winter, now is the time. The plant's needs for nutrients, including the three major actors - Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K), depends on age and stage of growth. All plants, but especially young tea, require a good balance of nutrients. We use a slow-release fertilizer mix of NPK of 10-10-10 for plants in the nursery.

If you are looking for an organic option, HollyTone (4-3-4) by Espoma is a nice choice. They also offer a product for acidifying soil, which may be needed since pH which is important for optimal uptake of nutrients in tea. Older plants that are harvested benefit from extra N (and K - if your soil test shows a deficiency). We use a mix with higher N and K in late winter, and then again in later spring/early summer. Good options for N include urea, blood or feather meal.



New spring growth emerging on pruned branches

## Friends of the Tea Garden

Camellia Forest and [JD Farms](#) have a longstanding friendship. We're not sure exactly how we met each other, but that's the beauty of the US tea growing community. Being able to connect over tea and exchange knowledge along the years. Our friends Jeff and Don established JD Farms in 2004. Both had agricultural backgrounds and a love for farming, so they began researching and building their blueberry farm in Poplarville. Jeff and Don started buying tea clones, seeds and seedlings from our nursery in 2008. The soil conditions for growing blueberries and the natural landscape of their farm were compatible for growing tea. Now JD Farms has between 9 and 10 thousand tea plants (wow!!!). They process and ship a variety of black and green teas under their label Pearl River Tea Products.

On their experience of growing tea for many years, Jeff notes that tea is a worthwhile plant to grow. Once established in the ground in an area with good drainage and ideally a rolling landscape, it's a hearty plant. JD Farms appreciates how the caffeine content in the tea leaves act like a natural insect repellent, as their farm uses minimal to no chemicals on its blueberry and tea plants. Jeff said learning about tea is "a lifelong journey." You learn as you go along and there is always a new process to learn from others. Tea processing is an art in this respect. Jeff's favorite part of tea processing is that moment when you're rolling the leaves and start to smell the familiar aroma of tea. There's gratification in transforming the leaf picked fresh off the plant into "something that then becomes this aromatic wonderful product" that you will eventually drink.

Jeff and Don have created a wonderful legacy with JD Farms. After 18 years, they are moving onto their next adventure and looking for new owners to take over the farm. They have enjoyed all the experiences at the farm and with people in their community, and step away with hope that whomever buys the farm will be enthusiastic about growing and processing tea. We here at Camellia Forest have loved visiting and sharing tea stories with Jeff and Don, and are grateful for our friendship. We wish them all the best and look forward to hearing about their new adventures over a nice cup of tea sometime soon.



Aerial view of JD Farms. The listing is [available online](#)