

# News from the Tea Gardens

## At Camellia Forest

Greetings and happy winter,

As I write this, I am enjoying a lovely cup of hot tea, while winter makes its mark – snow, sleet, and freezing rain. All the while I dream of spring as I draft our first workshop notes on pruning. This year the class will be open to volunteers who will be helping and providing feedback to improve handouts for future in-person classes. What else is new? We're filming some of the lessons to add to our upcoming online program of tea gardening basics, which will be available this spring on Patreon (Page 4).

We've also started our 2022 calendar of events, tours, and workshops. Some tend to fill up quickly, especially in June, as do times for private events.

With best wishes for the new year,

Christine

## What's been happening in the gardens?

'Tis the season for planning, pruning, and plant observation!

*Planning:* Last month we started preparing new sites for planting. We have thinned out some pine trees near the shady grove where we host our classes and tour groups, as we plan our “forest to field tea garden” plot that will extend from under pines into an adjoining sunny site.

*Pruning:* We're cutting back plants in the garden to varying degrees, and in greenhouses making formation cuts to 1-2 year old plants.

*Plant observation:* In the gardens we're reviewing plant health and adding to our notes for future cultivar selection. We've removed a few older plants that were failing to thrive in an area with poor drainage and erosion, looking for root rot (phytophthora), and evaluating the site for replanting. It's difficult, but necessary for the health of the other plants.

Winter 2022



## Workshops

### [TEA PLANTING](#)

Sunday, March 27, 9:30am-12pm

### [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

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is located at:*

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27516

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## Tea Garden Activities – Winter

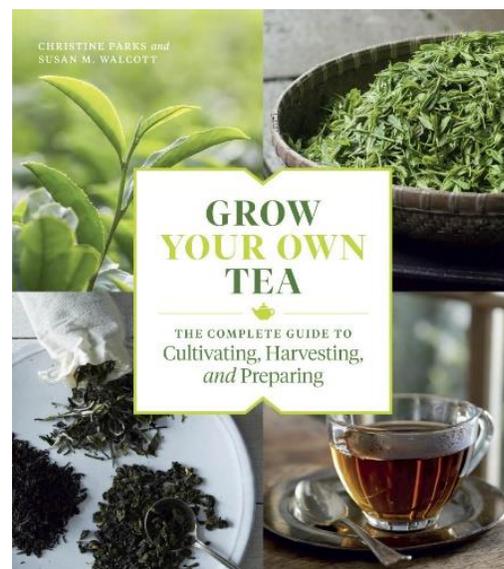
### *Pruning*

Winter is the best time to cut back the tea plants before the next season's growth. We recommend waiting until 2 to 3 months before you expect the first flush. Where to cut depends on the age of the plant and past pruning (see Pages 87-91 and 100-106, *Grow Your Own Tea*). This is a good time for decentering if you have a young plant that has put on a lot of growth in mid-to-late summer. In the greenhouse we are cutting back vigorous Sochi seedlings with 12 or more inches on a single stem!



*Recently pruned tea plants in the greenhouse*

## 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. In November we enjoyed our Q&A session at the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association Sustainable Agriculture Conference. We loved learning from people's questions/experiences, and next year hope to have an on-farm session.

As we look towards the spring, we're excited to be speaking to the Herb Society of America ([www.herbsociety.org](http://www.herbsociety.org)) in March. Many herbs can be a lovely addition to a tea garden, just like tea is a wonderful addition to an herb garden. Last year we added Tulsi, for blends with our green tea and on its own as a potent non-caffeinated tisane.

We are available for personalized classes, tours, and consulting by phone, zoom, or in-person. [Contact us](#) to book us at your next event-times fill up quickly!

## Fun Fact

Carbohydrate reserve is the name for when non-structural carbohydrates (e.g., glucose) produced by photosynthesis are stored as starch. Carbohydrates reserve is important for recovery from pruning. New shoots also play a role through active photosynthesis. Here are a couple of the more accessible articles we've been reading on the topic.

[https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jcs1927/65/1/65\\_1\\_108/\\_pdf/-char/en](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jcs1927/65/1/65_1_108/_pdf/-char/en).

[Phenotypic Markers Reflecting the Status of Overstressed Tea Plants Subjected to Repeated Shade Cultivation \(nih.gov\)](#)

## Our Mission and Vision for Camellia Forest Tea Gardens

### *Our mission*

At the Tea Garden, we are dedicated to three primary goals: (1) growing and evaluating the many tea varieties in our collection, including unique specimens of closely related Camellias, (2) lifelong learning about growing and making tea, and (3) sharing what we know and what we grow with gardeners and tea lovers. Together with Camellia Forest Nursery, we strive to provide opportunities for home gardeners and small farmers to grow their own tea. At the same time, we are also focused on sustainably growing – producing our own small-batch, artisan tea, and building community.

### *The journey so far*

In the past 15 years we have planted several new gardens, incorporating what we've learned along the way. We've evaluated new plants and made

"We had a kettle; we let it leak:

Our not repairing made it worse.

We haven't had any tea for a week...

The bottom is out of the Universe."

— **Rudyard Kipling, The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling**

selections – including a couple appealing as potential landscape plants, now sold at the nursery – “Christine’s Choice” and “Dave’s Fave.” As our gardens have matured, we have also been busy harvesting tea leaves and honing our tea processing skills. I still have a long way to go in my quest for a favorite oolong, but this past year yielded a couple of lovely batches. It has been wonderful to develop friendships in recent years with two experienced tea tasters who also have joined us as volunteers in the garden (see newsletter profile from [Summer, 2021](#)).

Our focus on education and community building has continued to grow, and we are loving it! For over a decade, we have opened our gardens to the general public twice a year, in spring to celebrate the first flush harvest and then later to mark the end of the season in fall. In 2020, we launched our book *Grow Your Own Tea* – a guide for new tea gardeners on the basics of planting, care and processing. We’ve since added new sections to our “harvest and process” workshops and tours introducing visitors to the tea gardens at Camellia Forest, and have given webinars and talks for audiences ranging from garden clubs and forums, to tea clubs, and the first Piedmont community tea symposium. We’ve enjoyed getting to know and work with a growing community, colleagues, students, and volunteers!

### *Our Vision*

As we look to the next five years, we see both a continuation and an expansion of our current mission to include an even greater focus on education and support for tea gardeners. In addition to seminars, on-site classes and custom tours, we are dedicated to providing accurate and accessible information to growers of all types, with a special focus on home gardeners. We have been exploring options to sustainably expand our educational resources and community, and have decided to use Patreon as a platform to connect with growers, utilizing a membership-based service.

Tea plants take years to grow, and even longer to evaluate. We are looking forward to trialing new plants and selections. In the next 5 years, we plan to more than double the size of our gardens – with more leaves for harvesting!

A big effort will soon be underway, as we have our plans and foundation in place (literally and metaphorically) for an on-farm tea processing studio and community workshop. The lower level will provide a space for processing and machinery to handle larger amounts of leaves from our garden as well as other growers. Upstairs will provide a weather-proof space for classes, tea tastings, and other events. Look forward to more details in the spring newsletter!

### *Camellia Forest Tea Gardens on Patreon*

We are passionate about providing accessible information and support for tea gardeners. As we seek to sustainably grow our resources and services, we have decided to use Patreon to offer a membership program.

Memberships will help support our internship program and educational mission, and are designed for all types of tea gardeners, including home growers to small farmers, and anyone who wants to learn about and support growing local tea!

At this time, there are two membership tiers [open](#). People who choose to donate as “Seedlings” will receive our quarterly newsletter and a personal thank-you, while “Gardeners” will have access to expanded newsletter content (including seasonal topics and gardening tips, fun facts, book reviews and more), informal videos (1-2 per month) so you can virtually visit and learn in our gardens at Camellia Forest, and a monthly live Q&A and tea chat with Christine.

We’ll also be creating a set of recorded workshop lessons on Patreon, separate from the membership. Look forward to this in the spring!