Camellia oleifera: Tea-Oil Camellia

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Introduction
Tea-oil camellia are so named because they are cultivated in their native homeland of China specifically for the seeds, from which is extracted commercial tea oil. This particular Camellia species looks much like Camellia sasanqua except the dark green, evergreen leaves are a bit larger, three to five inches long and two to three inches wide. Single, white, fragrant flowers are produced in late winter, and this large shrub or small tree will reach a height of 20 feet with thin, upright, multiple trunks and branches. The crown forms a rounded or oval vase with lower branches removed.

General Information
Scientific name: Camellia oleifera
Pronunciation: kuh-MEEL-ee-uh oh-lee-IF-er-uh
Common name(s): Tea-oil camellia
Family: Theaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6A through 9B (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: specimen; hedge; screen; street without sidewalk; container or planter; deck or patio; trained as a standard; parking lot island < 100 sq. ft.; parking lot island 100–200 sq. ft.; parking lot island > 200 sq. ft.; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); tree lawn 3–4 feet wide; tree lawn 4–6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft. wide; highway median; Bonsai
Availability: not native to North America

Figure 1. Middle-aged Camellia oleifera: Tea-Oil Camellia
Credits: Ed Gilman

Figure 2. Range
Camellia oleifera: Tea-Oil Camellia

**Description**
- **Height:** 15 to 20 feet
- **Spread:** 10 to 15 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical
- **Crown shape:** vase, round
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** slow
- **Texture:** medium

**Foliage**
- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** serrate
- **Leaf shape:** obovate, oblanceolate
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**
- **Flower color:** white/cream/gray
- **Flower characteristics:** showy

**Fruit**
- **Fruit shape:** round
- **Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch
- **Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- **Fruit color:** unknown
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**
- **Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** little required
- **Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** brown
**Current year twig thickness:** medium
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**
- **Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** unknown

**Other**
- **Roots:** not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no
- **Outstanding tree:** yes
- **Ozone sensitivity:** unknown
- **Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown
- **Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

**Use and Management**
Plants should require little pruning and their dense, compact, crown makes them ideally suited for informal borders, specimens, accents, and sheared or natural hedges or screens. Large specimens may be trimmed to multi- or single-trunked small trees. This is a great tree for planting along a street beneath power lines since it will not require pruning by the utility company, but unfortunately it is not yet readily available. Nurseries should grow and market this plant in a multi-stemmed and single-trunked form for this purpose.

Tea-oil camellia should be grown in full sun or partial shade on rich, moist, acid soils. It will tolerate drought once established and grows well in clay soil.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

**Pests**
Watch for scale infestation.

**Diseases**
No diseases are of major concern.