Celebrating Camellias

By DANNY HEITMAN

When most gardeners think of camellias, the first thing that comes to mind is camellia japonica, a big-bloomed, densely leafed species that's become a staple in many other shapes and sizes.

Womack said, "All of them have such positive shapes. They're very powerful in their outline. They have a strong outline. They really command attention."

The big craze for camellias was in the Victorian era, there was a certain snob appeal in having the classic camellia appealed to the Victorian preference for formal gardens. They were only kept in hot-houses as a conservatory plant. The big craze for camellias was in the Victorian era. There was a certain appeal in having them.

The clearly defined shapes of the classic camellias appealed to the Victorian preference for formal lines. Womack said, "Then after the end of World War I, popular tastes turned away from formal Victorian conventions, and the camellia lost popularity, said Womack. "In the '20s, there was a dying out of interest in camellias."

"Originality, when they were first imported from China, they were very tender," Womack said. "As a result, they were only kept in hot-houses as a conservatory plant. The big craze for camellias was in the Victorian era. There was a certain appeal in having them."

The book is less helpful in cap-

A convergence of Camellias, the program intended to highlight the plant's impressive variety. The open branches and small flowers of camellia lutchuensis, shown at right in this picture, aren't what most people think of when they think about camellias, said Wayne Womack, a professor of landscape architecture at LSU. The appearance of camellia lutchuensis makes it ideal for gardeners who want a more naturalistic look.

The Scientific Encyclopedia of Camellias is authored by Roger T. Peterson, though Macoboy's work is why you should... The "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Camellias" is a promising candidate for your bookshelf. Published by Timber Press in a $30 hardcover edition, it is available at LSU Hilltop Arboretum's gift shop, and will be sold at "A Convergence of Camellias". The Feb. 7 arboretum program featuring Womack. The "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Camellias" can also be ordered at any bookstore.
Second World War, there was a great (renewed) interest in them. In the South, where climate for camellias is ideal, the shrub has been a standard for generations, Womack said. "Most people probably identify it as an old Southern plant."

For gardeners who want a more naturalistic effect in the landscape, a number of lesser-known camellias offer plentiful options, Womack added. Womack's garden, which avoids tightly manicured lines in favor of a more diffused presentation, emphasizes camellias with small flowers and light colors. One of his favorites is camellia lutchuensis.

"The beauty of it is its wonderful fragrance," said Womack, referring to the plant's sublime scent, which recalls the muted fragrance of sweet olive blooms and English tea, with a hint of rose thrown in. "It's very subtle and hard to describe."

"The form of camellia lutchuensis is very open, and the flowers are very tiny — not more than an inch across," Womack said. "On a January day, you get the fragrance from these wonderful bell-shaped flowers. The species didn't become very widespread and available in the United States until the 1960s. They're very subtle."

Womack is also fond of willow leaf camellias. "The leaves are like willow leaves, and the plant has this arching, cascading quality," Womack said. "The form of the plant is very lacy."

Higo camellias, another Womack favorite, are distinguished by a large column of stamens that flare out from the blossoms like an egg yolk. "They were favorites of samurai warriors in Japan," Womack said. "I think they're a wonderful group."

Even when not in bloom, variegated camellias can provide visual interest with their two-toned leaves — often a smattering of deep green and copper. "Variegated leaf forms have given a whole new kick to the camellia thing," said Womack.