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# Some Old Camellias in Quinta Do Meio, Porto

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IN the north of Portugal the soil is mostly devoid of lime and consists of a friable loam containing a proportion of decomposed granite. This makes a perfect soil for camellias, especially when leaf-mould is added.

Camellia trees are found in nearly all the old northern "Quintas" or estates, some having grown into very large trees. My Quinta is an old one, how old I do not know as the only dated document I have is a water registration of 1786. As the population increased, Porto grew away from this district and fortunately left it undisturbed. The garden is on the side of a hill above the River Douro, facing south-west. It consists of four terraces looking down to the mouth of the river and out to the Atlantic Ocean. It is a beautiful situation and the view from the house, built on the second and third terraces is charming.

The old and large camellia trees are on the second terrace. One specimen with soft pink paeony form flowers is twenty-three feet high with a spread of thirty feet. Like many other trees in Portugal it must have been cut in its youth to make it spread otherwise it would have been much higher. Its divided trunk measures ten feet round, forty-two inches from the ground. Another tree is twenty-six feet high and has a spread of sixty feet. This produces paeony form blooms in three different colours, white, very pale pink and deep rose. A tree with striking medium sized flat rose red blooms is twenty-six feet high.

'Incarinata,' which is known as 'Camurça' in Portugal, is well represented here by three large trees, the tallest being sixteen feet. A favourite of mine with flat rose pink flowers is 'Princesa Real,' its leaves shade to a golden green. This camellia is neat looking and rather stiff and the flowers appear later than most cultivars. It is excellent for table decoration as it lights up exceptionally well. Also I have a large deep cerise paeony form unnamed variety that is most striking. I feel it is unsatisfactory that I can give so few names of the cultivars we grow, but the difficulty is that so many names have been lost or forgotten and many may be hybrids between "good neighbours."

In Portugal it is only recently that there has been a revival of interest in camellias, due most likely to the enthusiasm shown by tourists, who are astonished at the beauty of some of the cultivars and the size of the specimens. Some cultivars have been "re-discovered" and given names such as 'Herzilia Freitas de Magalhaes' or 'Augusto L. Gouveia Pinto,' both of which were called after a friend or member of the family of the person who found them;



**Above:** Large specimen of soft pink paeony form camellia with Author in the foreground.



**Left:** *Camellia reticulata* 'Captain Rawes'

names which most people will consider too long for everyday use. They are both beautiful camellias when they come true to colour, but I find mine, which grow out of doors, are rather variable, although I have seen some outstanding blooms of the latter in a camellia hedge at the Botanical Gardens.

'Saudade de Martins Branco' is a good shade of cerise and well worth growing. 'Portugal,' a large bright red single with very long yellow stamens, is a seedling introduced by Companhia Horticola Portuense Ltd. I find it a very prolific bloomer and it looks well in a pot for house decoration. In the garden are some of the old named cultivars, 'Fimbriata,' 'Alba Plena,' 'Mathotiana' and the exquisite 'Hagoromo' ('Magnoliiflora') now sixteen feet high. Two large trees of *C. reticulata* 'Captain Rawes' are always admired, one being eleven feet high with a spread on one side of four feet and a trunk of forty inches at two and a half feet.

On the third terrace there are six cultivars of *C. sasanqua* which must be at least fifty-five years old. They were given to my parents and came direct from Japan. I think they are probably 'Onigoromo,' 'Mikuniko,' and 'Minenoyuki.' They seed under the parent trees in great quantities.

Owing to the kindness of generous friends I have some of the newer cultivars from England which I am keeping in pots for the present. During the last few years I have been doing my best to return this generosity by sending to England material of unnamed camellias in Portugal which I think worth growing and in the hope that someone can give me the correct name. I am always on the lookout for worthwhile camellias and only the other day spotted a charming single bloom with light pink stripes when I was shown some clever flower paintings. I was told it came from a tree in a nearby village cemetery, so off I went to return with a big bunch of scions which were sent off to England and from which I hope later to receive a rooted cutting in return.

Part of the joy of growing camellias is that a young plant in a pot will start to flower when it is only one foot high! I grow a number in pots out-of-doors for house decoration and the only time they go under cover is during very strong south-westerly gales from the sea, for the salt-laden rain is liable to damage buds and foliage, otherwise their only shelter is from the thick leaves of a large grapefruit tree under which they stand during the winter.

Before ending I would like to mention the so-called "yellow" camellia which caused a certain amount of interest and speculation when it was re-discovered in a nursery garden near Porto. I was told that there was only one known tree, at any rate in Europe, but I thought it worthwhile to investigate this statement, and there sure enough was a flourishing tree in full bloom in another nursery garden. There I was shown an ancient catalogue where it was advertised under the name of 'Fortune's Yellow' ('Le Jaune').

It is a misnomer to call 'Jaune' yellow as it is actually a small camellia with cream petals round a collection of very bright yellow stamens and petalodes, which gives the impression that it is all yellow. It is more curious than beautiful but I like the effect when in a bunch. The plants I have seen appear to be quick growers. I was told it was old fashioned and had not been propagated for many years; now, however, it has been brought back into cultivation.