‘Anacostia’ *Camellia*

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The genus *Camellia* L. (Family Theaceae Mirb., nom. cons.) contains 119 to 280 species (Chang, 1998; Ming, 2000, as referenced by Vijayan et al. 2009) that are native to China and southeastern and eastern Asia. Although the most economically important member of the genus worldwide is the tea plant (*C. sinensis* L.), several species (e.g., *C. japonica* L., *C. reticulata* Lindl., *C. sasanqua* Thunb.) are cultivated for their ornamental attributes of glossy evergreen foliage and showy winter or spring blooms. Ornamental camellias first arrived in the United States in the late 1700s in Hoboken, NJ, and were initially grown in greenhouses in the northeastern United States as a nursery and florist crop (Brown, 1978). By the early 1900s, camellias were cultivated in the southeastern United States from Virginia down to Florida and west to Texas as well as in California, Oregon, and Washington. With advances in breeding for cold-hardiness, the range of cultivation of camellia has been extended to the mid-Atlantic area as well (Ackerman, 2007).

The National Arboretum in Washington, DC (USDA Hardiness Zone 7b) has maintained a collection of camellia germplasm and cultivars since the mid-1950s. This collection, along with the collection at the former Glenn Dale, MD, Plant Introduction Station, provided the genetic material for the productive camellia breeding and selection programs of Sylvester (Skip) March and William Ackerman, because it proved to be an ideal site to test for cold-hardiness. In the early 1970s, the National Arboretum camellia collection was comprised of close to 1000 specimens, consisting primarily of *C. japonica*, *C. sasanqua*, and *C. oleifera* C. Abel from collecting trips and seed exchanges. The *C. japonica* collection was evaluated and thinned out following a harsh winter of 1971–1972 in which unseasonably warm temperatures in December and early January were followed by a sudden cold snap (low temperatures of -16°C in mid-Jan. 1972), in which only 26% of the *C. japonica* cultivars were deemed fully cold-hardy (unpublished report of H. Skinner, 1972). The biggest loss to the collection, but also perhaps the most significant advances in identifying cold-tolerant germplasm, came after the two sequential winters of 1977 and 1978 when record low temperatures in the range of -11 to -15°C (in Jan. 1977 and

1978) accompanied by strong drying winds with gusts up to 45 mph resulted in the survival of less than 20 plants from the entire collection. It was from the *C. japonica* selections that were deemed cold-hardy in 1972 that the Arboretum's newest camellia, ‘Anacostia’, was selected.

Origin

‘Anacostia’ (NA35667, PI659061) is a seedling selection grown from a controlled cross made in the late 1960s by Skip March. The female parent was an undetermined white-flowered selection of *C. japonica*, whereas the pollen parent was *C. japonica* ‘Z’, a reportedly cold-tolerant selection that subsequently survived the cold 1977 and 1978 winters at the National Arboretum. The pollen parent plant originated from Dr. P.W. Zimmerman who labeled an unidentified plant from the University of Washington “Variety Z” and tested it for hardiness at the Boyce Thompson Institute in Yonkers, NY (Ackerman, 2007). ‘Anacostia’ was initially selected and accessioned in 1973 by Skip March but was not sent out for extensive testing. Based on field performance at the National Arboretum, ‘Anacostia’ was named and released in 2010.

The cultivar name Anacostia was registered in 2010 with the American Camellia Society in accordance with the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (Brickell et al., 2004). The name is a reference to the Anacostia River, near which the original plant of ‘Anacostia’ was planted at the U.S. National Arboretum. Herbarium specimens of ‘Anacostia’ were collected by the author and

deposited at the U.S. National Arboretum Herbarium as a horticultural standard (*Camellia japonica* ‘Anacostia’ Pooler NA62293).

Description

Camellia japonica ‘Anacostia’ is a moderate-sized, rounded evergreen shrub that has reached a height of 4 m and width of 2.5 m in 30 years in Washington, DC (USDA Hardiness Zone 7b; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1990). The foliage is glossy dark green [Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) 139A; Royal Horticultural Society and Flower Council of Holland, 1986] on the upper (adaxial) surface and yellow-green (RHS 146B) on the lower (abaxial) surface. Leaves are 9 to 11 cm long by 4.5 to 5 cm wide, acuminate at the tips, and obtuse at the base with serrulate leaf margins. Medium pink flower buds (RHS 53B) open to large semidouble pink (RHS 55A) flowers in early April in Washington, DC, and last for several weeks. Flowers are an average of 10 cm in diameter with conspicuous bright yellow anthers on 3-cm-long stamens (Fig. 1). Fruit set is light to non-existent.

Culture

Statements and recommendations on plant performance and culture are based on plants grown only at the U.S. National Arboretum. Like other *C. japonica* cultivars, Anacostia grows and flowers best in filtered shade in a well-drained, but not dry, slightly acidic soil. It is hardy in USDA Zones 7 to 9 and possibly into Zone 6b. It propagates relatively easily by semihardwood cuttings taken in mid- to late summer and treated with a quick dip in liquid rooting hormone containing 1000 ppm indole-3-butyric acid and 500 ppm 1-naphthaleneacetic acid. ‘Anacostia’ can also be grafted and can likely be micropropagated (Samartin 1989; Vieitez et al., 1992).

Outstanding Characteristics and Uses

‘Anacostia’ is well suited for use in the landscape as a single specimen plant, an evergreen hedge or screen, foundation plant,

Fig. 1. Flower of *Camellia japonica* ‘Anacostia’.

in a mass planting, or as a backdrop in the shrub border. It was selected primarily for its glossy dark green foliage on a relatively compact habit; abundant long-lasting, bright pink, semidouble blooms; and increased cold tolerance over the species.

Availability

Like other woody ornamental plants released from the National Arboretum, 'Anacostia' is not patented, so it may be propagated and sold freely. Because of the limited distribution of 'Anacostia', it is not available yet from wholesale or retail sources. The National Arboretum does not have stock of this cultivar available for general distribution but can supply unrooted cuttings or a limited number of liners to nurseries wishing to propagate 'Anacostia'. Requests for propagation material should be addressed to Carole Bordelon at the U.S.

National Arboretum (Carole.Bordelon@ars.usda.gov).

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