



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article November 06, 2017

The People in Your Garden: Charles Sargent by Lydia Holley

I have often wondered about the people whose named cultivars live in our gardens. Charles Sprague Sargent lives on in many East Texas gardens through the camellia named for him. Camellia ‘Professor Charles S. Sargent’ is a beautiful japonica camellia which flaunts big, full, red blooms. Each bloom is said to have over 200 petals, although I have never counted them myself. This camellia reaches up to 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide.



Sargent was born in Brooklyn and educated at Harvard. After a small stint in the Army during the Civil War, Sargent became Director and Professor at Harvard Botanical Garden. When Harvard opened the Arnold Arboretum, Sargent became its first Director, and served there for over 50 years. Arnold Arboretum consists of 281 acres. Designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted, Arnold Arboretum is a part of the Emerald Necklace, a chain of parks in Massachusetts linked together by flowing water.

Sargent had a love for trees, and in 1888, he became the editor of the weekly publication, “*Garden and Forest*”. He published “*Forest Flora of Japan*” in 1894 and the “*Manual of North American Trees*” in 1905. He is also credited for his work in helping conserve many of our national parks and forests.

The cultivar ‘Professor Charles S. Sargent’ camellia is not the only plant named for Sargent. Other plants honoring Sargent are the Sargent cherry (*Prunus sargentii*), Sargent viburnum, (*Viburnum sargentii*), Sargent juniper, (*Juniperus chinensis var. sargentii*), Sargent crabapple, (*Malus sargentii*), Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra var. sargentii*), weeping Canadian hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis ‘Sargentii’*), Sargent’s hydrangea (*Hydrangea sargentiana*), and a weeping cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani ‘Sargentii’*). There is even a rhododendron named for his wife, ‘Mrs. Charles S. Sargent’.

Sargent was a hard worker and extremely respected. In light of the number of plants named for this one individual, I believe Sargent must have also been a loyal friend. He was given several awards throughout his lifetime, and a tree was planted in his memory on the capitol grounds in Massachusetts.

There are stories about Sargent which reflect a brisk, cool disposition, and lack of enthusiasm. In one, the famous naturalist John Muir accused him of being unemotional in response to the beauty of nature. Sargent may have seemed outwardly indifferent to others, but inside, he was passionate about plants. I find it fitting that the camellia named for him grows to the size of a small tree, and blooms without restraint in late winter, when the days are still a bit chilly.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.