

CARE GUIDE:

Camellias



The Basics

This classic Southern beauty features lustrous evergreen foliage and pristinely gorgeous flowers in fall or late winter/early spring. They make excellent specimens, accent plants, or low privacy screens, and are easy to grow. Typically available in our region

are winter/spring blooming Japanese camellias (*Camellia japonica*), fall-blooming camellias (typically *C. sasanqua*), and tea camellias (*C. sinensis* --Plant these to grow your own tea!) as well as hybrids.

- Light -



Morning sun; afternoon shade. Avoid afternoon sun.

- Water -



First 3 years, regular watering. Mature plants drought tolerant.

- Soil -



Well-drained; acidic. Include organic matter.

MORE ON LIGHT

Camellias are adaptable to a range of light conditions but they prefer morning sun and afternoon shade, or bright dappled light all day. When planting, avoid afternoon sun, and windy sites. Some camellias are more sun tolerant than others (typically the fall-blooming *sasanqua* types). Tolerant plants will become accustomed to their sunny site, but usually look a bit sunburned when young.

MORE ON SOIL & PLANTING

Camellias like well-drained, acid soil with plenty of organic matter. When planting, amend soil with a pine bark soil conditioner, Permatill, or a mix such as Daddy Pete's Plant Pleaser Plus Permatill. See our Planting Guide for Trees & Shrubs for specific directions and diagrams on planting (available in store or on the website Learn page). Never plant camellias so that the base of the trunk is below the soil line. Do not permit soil or mulch to wash over the base of the trunk and cover it. Do mulch over the root zone area with mulch of choice to a depth of 2-3".

Camellias make excellent container plants. Put plants from 3-5 gallon pots into half-barrel or 20-24" pots. Use a planting mix heavy in pine bark fines, or a mix of 50% fluffy potting soil and 50% pine bark soil conditioner. Avoid mixes containing fertilizer.

MORE ON WATERING

Camellias need regular water for the first three years in the ground. Young plants can and will die if they get too dry. "Regular water" means watering enough to soak the root ball 1-2 times a week in spring and fall, and 2-3 times a week in summer for the first year. It's good to water newbies during winter dry spells, too. Once established they can survive on natural rainfall. Old camellias are quite drought tolerant.

FERTILIZING

Fertilizing is beneficial but take care not to over-fertilize, as this can predispose the plants to winter injury. Use a complete commercial plant food formulated for "acid-loving plants" such as Holly-tone and don't use more than called for on the label. April is a good time to apply.

PRUNING

Prune after flowering. You can prune to get the form you want. Cut back tops to make lanky shrubs more bushy. Thin the bottom to form a patio tree. Shorten lower branches to promote upright growth. It's always a good idea to remove dead or weak wood. Thin branches, if plants become too dense for flowers to open properly.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Camellias don't have many problems when planted properly and given enough water, but here are a few things to look out for:

TEA SCALE: The most important camellia pest is a small brown/gray insect that looks like scabs (female) on the leaf underside, often with many white males and cottony, web-like accumulations. The upper leaf surface can show yellow blotches and pale speckles. Prevent by spraying with horticultural oil spray after plants bloom. This spray also controls existing infestations, as will a systemic insecticide labeled for scale insects. Oil spray has the added benefit of smothering eggs. Avoid oil sprays when temperatures are above 85°F.

CAMELLIA PETAL BLIGHT: This serious fungal disease lives in soil and causes flowers to turn brown. (Note: It can be confused with cold damage.) Brown areas rapidly spread to the center of the flower, and the flower drops within 24-48 hours. Sanitation is the best control. Pull off and destroy infected flowers. Rake up and remove all leaves, flowers, debris, and mulch. Replace mulch. For serious infestations, spray with a fungicide such as liquid copper.



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