

Camellias

Camellias are native to Japan, China and Indo-China, where they grow on well-drained wooded slopes under light shade. A natural mulch of leaves accumulates beneath the plants. The plants were successfully grown in Northern California around 1853, and they have been popular ever since.

Camellias need good drainage to do well, so be sure the area you want to grow them does not stay too wet. If your drainage is poor, you might try a raised bed or container. Camellias like a soil mix that is high in humus content and slightly acidic. In preparing the soil, mix ample amounts of redwood compost, peat moss or a good Camellia-Azalea mix, usually using about 1/3 good garden soil, and 2/3 humus or planting mix.

Find a location that does not get hot sun if you choose the Japonica varieties. Sasanqua varieties can take full sun along the coast, but would look better if they get some shade in warmer inland areas.

Dig a hole approximately twice as large in diameter as the original container (1 gallon plants, a slightly larger hole would be better, such as 20" or so). The hole should be about 1.5 times as deep. Use your prepared mix in the bottom of the hole and tamp firmly so the top of the root ball, when placed in the hole is 1" above the soil surface. Fill in around the sides of the root ball with the same mixture as above. Tamp it down firmly to get rid of any lumps and air pockets. When the hole is full, it is wise to form a berm around the plant with soil to hold water and fill with water two times to be sure the plant is thoroughly watered.

Water your new plant as needed, but be sure it does not get dry, they should be moist at all times but be sure they do not stay soggy wet or the roots will rot.

Fertilize camellias with a good balanced fertilizer as soon as new growth appears in the spring. Follow the directions on the package and be sure not to overfeed them. Cotton seed meal is a favorite of many growers. There are other mixtures of fertilizers formulated for camellias, just follow the label directions. A supplemental feeding of iron will keep the foliage a deeper green. Do not fertilize a dry plant; instead water thoroughly the day before you feed the plant. Stop feeding in November. If you keep feeding the plants, the flower buds will drop and you will get no blooms.

Insects are usually not a problem, however, occasionally scale or mites are a nuisance. Aphids on the new growth can usually be washed off with a strong stream of water. Spraying may be necessary and a good systemic insecticide will control most problems.

Camellia Japonica, *C. Reticulata* and most of the hybrids need protection from the hot sun. Some of the deep pinks and reds will do well in full sun if you are less than five miles from the coast. Inland, shade or filtered sun will keep the plants looking better. Light pinks and white blooming plants should not get direct sun. Camellia Sasanqua is able to stand full sun, even in warmer inland areas, but they will do well in shade also. Generally speaking, Sasanqua varieties bloom earlier usually starting in November and the Japonicas usually start about the first of the year. Sasanquas have smaller leaves and blooms, generally with the Japonicas and Reticulatas having the largest. Reticulata varieties and hybrids tend to have a little more rangey growth habit.