



CAMELLIA

Camellias are large, attractive, broad-leaved evergreen shrubs that are highly prized for their flowers, which bloom from winter to spring. There are more than 2300 named cultivars registered with the American Camellia Society. The most commonly used camellias include cultivars of Japanese camellia (*Camellia japonica*), Sasanqua camellia (*C. sasanqua*), tea-oil camellia (*C. oleifera*), tea camellia (*C. sinensis*), and the many hybrids of *C. reticulata* and *C. salvenensis*.

MATURE HEIGHT AND SPREAD

Common Japanese camellia (*C. japonica*) may grow to a height of 25 feet, but more often to only 6 to 12 feet. It has a spread of 6 to 10 feet. The dark green leathery leaves are four inches long. The flowers, which range in color from white to pink and red, are three to five inches in diameter. It flowers from September until April, depending upon the variety. The flowers may be single, semi-double, or double. Some of the Japanese camellias around the emperor's palace in Japan are known to be more than 500 years old.

Camellia sasanqua varies in form from upright (to 12' tall) and densely bushy, to low (1 ½ feet) and spreading. The dark green shiny leaves are about two inches long, usually darker and smaller than those of *C. japonica* or *C. reticulata*. The flowers are mostly white and single, two to three inches in diameter, and very fragrant.

Camellia oleifera is a large shrub to 20 feet, with glossy, dark green leaves and fragrant, 2-inch-wide flowers in fall.

Camellia reticulata has some of the biggest and most spectacular flowers, but is a rather gaunt and open shrub, approximately ten feet tall and eight feet wide. This species is very susceptible to cold. Mild frost will kill the plant. *C. reticulata* hybridized with *C. japonica* or *C. salvenensis* results in excellent hybrids.

GROWTH RATE

Camellias grow very slowly, and can live to be quite old. Some hundred-year-old plants may reach twenty-five feet or more in height and width, but most gardeners can expect camellias to reach only 10 feet, with many varieties even shorter. *C. sasanqua* varieties are faster growing than *C. japonica*.

LANDSCAPE USE

Camellias are used as large specimen shrubs, shrub borders, and screens. The main ornamental features are their showy flowers.

CULTIVATION

Camellias need well-drained soil, rich in organic material. Because they are slow-growing, they are slow to establish, and adequate water is the critical factor. They thrive and bloom best when sheltered from full sun and drying winds.

You can plant camellias at any time of year, provided they are properly planted, but the best times are mid-October through November and mid-March to mid-April. Camellias are shallow-rooted plants, and must be planted "high." We recommend digging a large, deep planting hole, cutting the roots of neighboring trees which might otherwise compete for water. Also, remove stones and break up heavy clay soils. Partially fill the hole with loose soil before planting the camellia shallowly.

Check for water needs frequently, and conserve soil moisture by using a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch. Camellias prefer a slightly acid soil, and light applications of an acidic plant food may be used to maintain dark-green foliage. Some flower bud dropping is a natural phenomenon, as many camellias set more buds than they can open. Bud drop can be caused by under-watering in summer.

Camellias require very little pruning, except for the removal of damaged branches or of long shoots that may detract from the attractive form of the shrub. Severe cut-back (no leaves left on the plant) can be done safely from Valentine's Day to around May 1. Cutting out dead and weak stems can be done anytime.