

# Camellias

## A Garden Guide

With their captivating flowers, long bloom period, and handsome evergreen foliage, these classic shrubs of the South are a wonderful addition to any garden. With careful selection, they can be grown here in the mountains of WNC. *Camellia sasanqua* bloom from fall to winter and can handle slightly more sun than other types; *Camellia japonica* bloom from winter to spring and are slightly larger. There are many hybrids available that have been bred for increased winter hardiness, bigger flowers, more complex flowers, and other desirable traits. There are over 3000 different cultivars available, with flower colors ranging from pure white, to pinks, to deep red, to lavender-purple. Flower forms vary, such as: single, semi-double, and fully double. A few cultivars are exceptional for their fragrance. With a 100+ year lifespan, they are known to outlive the gardeners who plant them. Native to East Asia, they have been cultivated for over a 1000 years. In the language of flowers, Camellias represent faithfulness and longevity.



**Siting:** Camellias perform best with morning sunlight, and afternoon shade. Full sun can stress, burn, and discolor the plants. They benefit from protection, especially winter winds, and do well planted against houses and rock walls. Avoid planting down in a frost pocket. Camellias are often planted as an evergreen backdrop in beds, as lovely specimens, and as dense hedges.



**Soil and Planting:** Camellias prefer a pH of 5.5-6.5, with moist, **well-draining** soil. Usually in our soils, they will need at least 1/3rd soil conditioner, up to 1/3rd rich composts, mixed with our native clay. Gently applying mycorrhizae directly to the roots, just prior to planting, will improve plant resilience. Dig a hole 2-3x as wide as the pot; plant the root ball slightly above the soil line. Apply 2-3" of mulch to the root zone, do not let it touch the trunk or any woody roots that might be visible.

**Fertilizing:** Camellias benefit from fertilizers designed for acid-loving plants. Happy Frog® Acid Loving Plants Fertilizer, Espoma Holly-tone®, and Symphony Organic Fertilizer are all good choices. Compost tea is a wonderful snack for your plants in the spring and summer. They are heavy feeders. In order to ensure abundant blooms, feed (at a minimum) in early spring, late spring, and mid summer. They can be fed organic low-to-no Nitrogen fertilizers in the fall.



**Watering:** Water newly planted shrubs immediately after planting, during their first year in the ground, and as needed throughout the growing season, especially during any periods of drought. Inconsistent watering can lead to poor flower bud formation.



**Organic Spray Schedule:** Camellias have few significant disease and pest issues, especially when sited correctly, in partial shade with good drainage and winter protection. For pest issues that might arise, Horticultural Oil, Neem Oil, or Insecticidal Soap are good options. If fungal issues arise, such as Camellia Canker, prune to promote air circulation, remove diseased parts, and spray with Copper if necessary.

**Pruning:** As slow growing shrubs, pruning is only done on an as-needed basis, usually post-flowering. Healthy Camellias can handle significant pruning - up to 1/3rd of the plant removed per year, but this usually is not necessary unless they are older plants in need of some rejuvenation. The next year after a heavy

pruning, flowers may be scarce due to the plants concentrating on putting on new growth. It may be beneficial, in time, to thin out the interior branches to help improve air flow. Damaged or dead growth can be removed at any time.

With appropriate siting, ample nutrients, and consistent watering you can ensure maximum blooms. Do note that it is perfectly natural for some buds to drop, even with ideal care. Version 1.0 Aug 22

