



Camellias

Site: Most camellias grow and produce better flowers in partial shade. Plants located in full sun often are less dormant during warm periods of the winter and may suffer damage if cold weather follows. Plants in a northern or western exposure of a building or fence or otherwise protected from intense morning sun will usually stand more cold weather than those in an eastern or southern exposure. Choose a planting site with well-drained soil. Do not plant where shade trees with shallow root systems will compete with camellias for nutrients and water. Plants in the sun may suffer scald on the leaves or leaves may appear yellow rather than deep green. Plants of *Camellia sasanqua* generally do better in the sun than those of *C. japonica*.

Soil preparation: Camellias will grow in most well-drained slightly acid soil. A soil pH (degree of acidity or alkalinity) of 6.0-6.5 is considered best for camellias. However, they will tolerate a lower pH. A soil test made before planting will tell you what is needed to bring the soil to the desired pH and fertility level. Practically all soils will benefit from the addition of organic matter when planting. Two to four inches of peat moss, leaf mold, pine bark mulch, or mushroom compost worked into the soil improves both the drainage and fertility of the soil.

Planting: Camellias are generally planted in the late fall through the early spring although they may be set out any month of the year if properly cared for. Adequate moisture is a necessity until the roots become well established in the soil. The newly developed roots will then provide enough moisture for the plant to start growth when spring arrives. Allow a minimum of five feet between plants and preferably more when planting unless planting a hedge when a distance of three feet between plants is recommended. The following steps should be followed when planting a camellia:

1. Dig a hole at least two feet wider than the root ball.

2. Leave soil at the bottom of the hole undisturbed to prevent settling.
3. The top of ball should be slightly above soil level. When planting a container-grown plant, wash away the soil from the root ball with a water hose and rough up the root ball if tight to allow better penetration into the soil.
4. Fill the hole around the root ball with the removed soil and organic matter.
5. Build a berm of soil around the plant three feet in diameter to prevent water from running off.
6. Mulch with other organic matter around the plant.
7. Water well after planting and soak once a week during dry weather.

Watering and mulching: Camellias prefer for the soil to remain moist, but not soggy, all the time. When watering, the soil should be wet to a depth of 14" to 18". Mulching the surface of the soil around the camellias can help keep the soil cooler and hold moisture. In addition, mulch can help eliminate weeds. Two to four inches of pine straw, bark, or other organic matter makes good mulch. Do not use peat moss as mulch as it dries out and can become quite hard to wet. Camellias prefer to be planted near the top of the soil. Do not pile mulch too high as this can keep the soil too wet and provide good conditions for root rot.

Fertilizing: Camellias should be fertilized in the spring following flowering. Organic fertilizers such as cottonseed meal have been used successfully for years. Commercially prepared inorganic fertilizers (such as 10-10-10) will also do a great job. Sprinkle on top of the mulch and allow rain or irrigation to wash into the soil. A soil test will identify any problems or special needs that may exist. Too often Camellias are overlooked in the designing of a home landscape. This is sad because these plants provide a beautiful show when used correctly in the home landscape.

Information from the American Camellia Society