

CAMELLIAS

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Camellias are a group of broadleaf evergreen shrubs valued for their winter to early spring bloom and glossy green foliage. They come in many shades of white to red, and many different sizes. Camellias can be used as small trees, shrubs, or can even be trained on a trellis.

Latin name: *Camellia spp.*

Type: Evergreen Shrubs

Exposure: Part shade

Growth rate: Moderate

Hardiness: 0° F, lower for some

Size: Varies. 10'+ in height

Soil: Well drained, acidic

Growth habit: Upright to upright spreading

What are the differences between *Camellia japonica* and *sasanqua*?

The Japanese Camellia (*Camellia japonica*) is the standard camellia that most people know. It is strongly upright, and can turn into a small tree in time. Its blooms will appear in late winter-mid spring and are usually quite large and showy. The Winter Blooming Camellia (*Camellia sasanqua*) tends to be more spreading, although in time it can grow to the same size as the Japanese Camellia. Its growth tends to be very wiry which makes it a good candidate for espaliers or any other kind of special training. It will start blooming in late fall, a month or two earlier than the Japanese, and will continue on into spring. The flowers will be smaller than on the Japanese Camellia, but this is actually a good thing in some regards because the smaller blooms shatter when they are finished, instead of rotting on the plant like the Japanese Camellia. Both are great types, and can be very useful in different places.

How much sun and heat will my camellias take?

Camellias will need part shade and protection from too much heat to thrive, as they will naturally prefer a cooler environment. It won't take a long amount of time in too much heat to severely damage a camellia, so keep this in mind, especially when purchasing in the summer. Also, beware of leaving your newly purchased camellia in a hot car, as you can actually watch the leaves burn on a really hot day.

What kind of soil will I need?

Camellias need the exact same soil as Rhododendrons: Acidic and well-drained.

How and when should I prune and fertilize?

Camellias don't require a lot of pruning other than to tidy up, but will take heavy pruning if necessary. Prune right after bloom, but before the new growth starts, as the plants will bloom on previous years' growth. Older plants may need a major pruning in order to rejuvenate. So if your plant is old and really tired looking, you can go ahead and cut quite a bit of it off to stimulate new growth. Fertilizing can be done in spring with an acidic fertilizer, usually labeled for Rhodies, Azaleas, and Camellias.

What are some potential problems?

Sooty Mold: A black, sooty substance on the leaf. This is actually caused by two problems, an insect and a fungus. The insect is sucking on the leaves and secreting a sticky substance, which in turn becomes home to a fungus, which is the black you see. The best thing to do is to wipe the mold off and spray with an insecticide.

Scale: A little brown bump (actually a bug) that sits on the leaf. Spray with an appropriate insecticide.

Leaf scorch: This will be worse in younger plants, and is just a browning of the leaves. Either you need to water more, move the plant to a cooler location, or just wait it out and see if it stops in maturity.

Nutrient deficiency: Camellias can suffer from iron chlorosis, just like many other members of their family. This will be shown by a yellowing of the leaves, leaving green veins, and is due to a lack of iron. To correct this fertilize with a good fertilizer with iron, or use an iron supplement.