

Camellias

Camellias were brought from the Far East in the early 1700s to Europe, and then to America. There are over 3,000 named kinds, and the range in color, form and size is remarkable. Most varieties are either *C. japonica*, *C. sasanqua*, *C. reticulata*, or hybrids of more than one species. They range in color from pure white to vivid crimson.

Camellias are grown successfully out of doors in the United States from Long Island, N.Y. down along the Atlantic Coast, the Gulf Coast, and along the Pacific Coast from California to Washington. Mid-season flowering varieties that bloom from January 1 until the end of February are best suited for warmer conditions. In cooler climates, early (November – December) and late-flowering (March – April) varieties are recommended. Many varieties will tolerate temperatures as low as 10° F occasionally without plant damage. Temperatures below freezing will damage open flowers unless trees or other shrubs protect them. Buds that have not opened can withstand temperatures much below freezing without damage, and will open once temperatures have warmed again.

Most camellias will grow and produce flowers in partial shade. If planted in full sun, they are often less dormant during warm periods of winter and may suffer damage if cold weather follows. Plant in well-drained soil. Do not plant where shallow rooted trees will compete for nutrients and water. Camellias prefer a slightly acid soil, with a pH between 6.0 and 6.5, but will tolerate a lower pH. They also prefer a moist, but not soggy, soil. The cooler the climate, the more sun camellias need in order to produce flowers, which means that a western or southern exposure will be the best site.

Planting should be done in the fall, although they may be set out in any month of the year if properly cared for. They need adequate moisture until the roots become established in the soil. Camellias prefer to be planted near the top of the soil, so do not bury the trunk, but maintain existing soil line. Allow a minimum of five feet between the plants, unless you are planting a hedge, when a distance of three feet between plants is recommended. A camellia hedge is a striking addition to a garden.

You should fertilize camellias in the spring after flowering is completed. At the same time, remove all spent flowers from the surrounding ground to control the spread of botrytis or petal blight.

Scale insects are the most troublesome and common pests on camellias. They usually go unnoticed until a lot of damage has occurred. They injure the plant by sucking vital juices out. There are several scale insects that attack the camellia plant, i.e. tea scale, camellia scale, peony scale, and the wax scale. They are found as follows:

Tea scale – undersides of leaves, causing chlorotic splotches on upper leaf. Most common scale insect on camellias. Males whitish, and secrete a white, wooly-like mass. Females are dark brown.

Camellia scale – only infects leaves. Light to medium brown, oyster shaped.

Peony scale – less common than the above types of scale insect, but serious. Infections can kill branches and entire plants if not controlled. Found on stems and branches. Hard shell blends with the color of stems.

Wax scale – found on stems and trunks. Have a waxy covering that is white or slightly pink.

To control scale insects, oil emulsion sprays should be used at the first sign of scale. The sprays should only be applied during the spring and fall when temperatures are between 40° and 85° F.

Camellias are also attractive to both aphids and mites. Strong sprays of water can control aphids, while mites can be controlled by miticide sprays.

Resources

Camellia Growing Tips and Culture, [American Camellia Society website](#). Retrieved March 30, 2004.

Brenzel, Kathleen Norris. *Sunset Western Garden Book*. Menlo Park: Sunset Books Inc., 2001.

Ferguson, Nicola. *Right Plant, Right Place*. New York: Summit Books, 1984.