

Botanical name: *Camelia* sp

Common Name: Camellia

Family: Theaceae

Origin: Eastern and southern from the Himalayas east to Japan and Indonesia.

Nomenclature: Named by Carl Linnaeus after: Georg Joseph Kamel the Jesuit botanist who worked in the Philippines and described a species of camellia.

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I first fell in love with the Camellia on many treasured visits to Eryldene in Gordon Sydney, the home of renowned Eben Gowrie Waterhouse. E B Waterhouse undertook research into the origin of the camellia, its culture and nomenclature. He co-founded the Australian and New Zealand Camellia Research Society, wrote two books on camellias and founded Camellia Grove nursery in St Ives. He is known as the father of camellias in Australia. Many of my camellias in my Sydney garden were purchased there. Imagine my joy to discover that many camellias grow well in our region.

Flowering since April are some of the most beautiful flowering shrubs one could have in their garden, the Camellia. With over 200 species and over 3000 hybrids there is a camellia that is right for any garden. Most people being familiar with *C. sasanqua* and *C. japonica*, however there are very many other garden desirables such as *C. lutchuensis* and its cultivars which are fragrant and even yellow camellias such as *C. nitidissima* and its cultivars such as *C. Jury's Yellow*. Some camellias are of economic importance, we are all familiar with *C. sinensis* whose young leaves are used to create tea, even *C. oleifera* which produces tea seed oil used for cooking and cosmetics.






The *Camellia japonica* is the most common in cultivation with over 2000 named cultivars. Followed by *C. reticulata* with over 400 named cultivars and *C. sasanqua* with over 300 named cultivars. A few popular hybrids include *C. x hiemalis* (*C. japonica* x *C. sasanqua*) and *C. williamsii* (*C. japonica* x *Camellia saluenensis* | *C. saluenensis*). Some cultivars be huge reaching up to 100m².

There are a number of flower forms:



SINGLE

One layer of up to 8 petals, surrounding a central stamen cluster. Many *sasanquas* and species are this form. E.g. 'Spencer's Pink', 'Yuletide'.

	SEMI-DOUBLE Two or more layers of 9 or more petals, again surrounding a central bunch of stamens. E.g. 'The Czar', 'White Nun'.
	ANEMONE FORM One or more rows of large outer petals, lying flat or undulating, the centre a convex mass of petaloids and stamens. E.g. 'Elegans'.
	PEONY FORM Also called informal double. Many layers of irregular and wavy petals. E.g. 'Debutante', 'Tomorrow'.
	ROSE FORM DOUBLE Many layers of petals. The flower opens as a formal double, but when fully open shows stamens in the centre. E.g. 'Tabbs'.
	FORMAL DOUBLE Many rows of regular petals, building up to the centre, and never showing stamens. E.g. 'Otome', 'Desire'.

Source: <http://www.camelliasnsw.org/>

Basic camellia cultivation is that they require shelter from the intense afternoon heat and sun of summer and protection from early morning sun in winter with dappled sun providing the best conditions for bud set and blooms to open. There are some cultivars that can tolerate more sun than other but in general *C. sasanqua* and dark coloured *C. japonica* and hybrids are more tolerant of sun. See list at <http://www.camelliasnsw.org/> under Garden Camellias.

Camellias require a friable soil, rich in nutrients and well composted. They prefer an ericaceous (acid) soil with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5 with a soil depth of at least 40cm. Mulch plants to retain moisture and to keep roots cool in summer, well composted cow manure or leaf mould are recommended. Camellias are fairly drought tolerant and can withstand dry periods once established but regular moisture is vital to the health of the plant.

Camellias require a once or twice yearly application of slow release fertiliser e.g. Nutricote or Osmocote, at a rate of approx. one handful for an established 2mtr plant. An application of liquid fertiliser in August gives the plant a good start for the growing season.

Some plants may suffer from chlorosis, an iron deficiency, or magnesium deficiency evident by a general yellowing of leaves. A simple application of Epsom salts or iron chelates can be applied.

Camellias planted in full sun or against a north or west facing wall will often get scorched. The leaves of the plant facing the sun develop a burnt bronze/yellow appearance and will not recover once affected. Affected leaves may become susceptible to leaf fungal disease. Protection from harsh sun or planting in a shadier location or choose varieties that are more sun hardy. Generally *C. sasanqua*, *C. reticulata* and their hybrids with dark flowers can endure sunnier locations as long as they are maintained in good health.

Frost and high rainfall can also affect blooms with light coloured cultivars being more susceptible. These should be planted in easterly aspects and not facing prevailing, wet or frosty conditions.

Well-established camellia plants are drought tolerant but will be affected by severe drought.



Flower Photos: Faye Smith via Bangalow Garden Club Facebook page.

Sources: <http://www.camelliasnw.org/>; <https://www.gardenia.net/plant-variety/camellias-all-you-need-to-know>