

## Camellias

**Camellias are slow growers but can live for up to 30 years. If planted in acidic soils in shady areas, they will produce wonderful winter colour to keep you smiling throughout the drab months.**

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Camellias are small evergreen trees covered by attractive glossy green foliage with masses of showy blooms in winter when the rest of the garden is looking particularly dull. They belong to the family Theaceae and are native to eastern and southern Asia.

Commercially, *Camellia sinensis*, is of major importance as tea is made from its leaves. But there is a wide variety of plants to choose from for the garden.

Although these plants are shallow-rooted, they have a deep tap root that is able to find water. Avoid planting them near other shallow-rooted plants or where the soil is often dug over, when planting annuals for example.

Camellias grow in semi shade, ideally where light filters through a canopy of trees. *C.sasanqua*, however, can tolerate more sun. Total shade will result in lack of bud formation in some varieties. Avoid also planting camellias in windy spots.

They can tolerate most soils except clay or those which are very alkaline. They grow best in slightly acidic well-drained soil containing lots of organic matter so be sure to add a good mulch layer.

Water well and deep during the summer months. They can be fairly drought tolerant once established, but keep them hydrated with the correct care and they will thrive.

Pruning is only necessary to shape the plant but it usually has a nice compact form anyway. If plants are untidy, prune after flowering - just before new growth begins. Bud-drop is a common problem with blooms dropping before they have a chance to open. This can be caused by the plant drying out during the previous summer or autumn.

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The first of the popular garden varieties to flower is *C. sasanqua*, followed by *C.japonica*, *C.reticulata* and then *C.oleifera*.



Above: *Camellia sasanqua* in bloom