

# Wallsend Nurseries

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## Growing Camellias

Camellias are some of the most rewarding plants and are a great addition to any garden. Their spectacular flower display is the showpiece of many winter gardens.

There are several types of camellias and they differ slightly in their tolerance of sunlight and hardiness.

The first and hardiest are the Sasanqua Camellias. These are faster growing than the other varieties and are suitable for hedging and screening. Their growth habit is dense and bushy. The foliage is a deep glossy green and withstands exposure to sunlight well. Many of the Sasanquas produce single or semi-double flowers and these range in colour from white to pink to red with many shades in between. A few of them produce formal double flowers. The plants can be clipped into shape every second year or so if desired to encourage strong bushy growth. If they are pruned too often you will not get a very good flower display as the flowers are borne on new season's growth which is produced in spring and summer. Flowering season is early and starts from late summer till late autumn. Height varies from one metre to as much as four metres, depending on the variety chosen.

The second group, and probably the best known, are the Japonica Camellias. Japonicas have larger deep green foliage and generally large showy blooms. Colours range from white to deep red and the flowers are spectacular when the bush is in full bloom in mid winter. Flowering starts from mid autumn and may continue right through till late winter or even early spring. The plant is slower growing than the Sasanquas and frequently tidier in appearance if left unpruned for many years. They are not usually as sun tolerant as the Sasanquas, preferring a position that is sheltered from the strongest sun and definitely NOT in a position that is subject to morning sun. Bud drop and burning frequently occurs if the plant is exposed to morning sunlight. Some of the darker coloured varieties, particularly the reds, are somewhat tolerant however.

The third group are known as Reticulata Camellias. These are large growing and generally produce huge and spectacular flowers. They are somewhat sun tolerant but still prefer a position not exposed to morning sunlight. Their growth habit can sometimes be straggly but the spectacular flowers more than make up for this. They can be subject to stem dieback in hot humid climates and so are best grown in cooler areas.

All camellias require similar conditions to really thrive in your garden. The soil should be rich in organic material. Before planting you might like to dig in some well rotted cow manure, garden compost or peat moss. Do not use lime as Camellias require a soil that is slightly acidic in nature ( a pH of around 5.5-6.5 is usually adequate). The soil also needs to be moisture retentive but well drained. Mulch well after planting with a thick layer of sugar cane mulch, cow manure or something similar to retain moisture and keep the soil cool.

Plant most varieties in a semi shaded position although Sasanquas and a few hardy varieties will tolerate full sun with little problem as long as they are kept moist during hot weather.

Prune lightly when the plants are young to encourage dense bushy growth and a well shaped bush. Older plants may be pruned with discretion after flowering in September.

Fertilizer should be applied in spring and again in summer to promote flowering and healthy green foliage. Use a suitable Camellia/ Azalea fertiliser for best results at the recommended rates.

Pest problems are minimal. Scales are the worst problem but are easily treated with Antiscale® or Pest Oil®. Confidor® can be used to control aphids.