

Camellias

Camellias are a well-loved Southern favorite, flowering in the fall and winter when their display of colorful blooms is most appreciated. During the remainder of the year their evergreen foliage, interesting shapes and textures, and relatively slow growth make camellias excellent landscape plants. Thousands of camellia varieties are available from nurseries, including varieties with single tiered or double flowers available in pure white to a wide range of colors and color combinations. Regardless of what color suits you, varieties that bloom from November through January are best suited for Florida since our climate often prevents early and late blooming varieties from flowering properly.

The most commonly grown species of Camellias are the Sasanqua Camellia (*C. sasanqua*) and the Japonica Camellia (*C. japonica*). In general, Sasanquas blossom before Japonicas and have smaller flowers and leaves. While both prefer broken shade, Sasanquas can tolerate full sun if provided with adequate irrigation. Other than that, their requirements are pretty well the same, preferring rich, moist soil (although adaptable to other soils as long as it is well-drained), well-watered conditions until established, an acid-forming complete fertilizer (similar to azalea fertilizers), and a proper location such as under pine trees or on the north or west side of buildings where they are injured less by cold temperatures.

Camellias are best planted from November to February so the roots can become established before the summer heat. Plants should be spaced according to their mature size, usually at least five feet apart. Organic mulch should also be used to help retain soil moisture and reduce temperature fluctuations in the root zone. When fertilizing your camellia, usually no more than two applications per year are necessary: after the first flush of growth (April/May), and mid-summer (July). Since late summer and fall fertilization can cause tender growth to be injured by early cold periods, it's better to skip an application than apply it too late in the year. In general, a 1/4 cup of 12-4-12 or 15-5-15 (or similar fertilizer) should be applied over a 25 square foot area around each plant per application. If multiples are planted together, apply no more than 1 cup of fertilizer per 100 square feet of planting area.

Water the plants before and after you fertilize and remember to apply only light amounts of fertilizer since over-fertilization can cause leaf damage and/or spindly growth which can spoil the natural compact appearance of the plant. Because of their naturally beautiful forms, they do not require much pruning but can be lightly pruned as needed during early spring after flowering. Compact forms work great as foundation plantings, while taller forms make stunning specimen plants in mixed beds. Just be sure to do your homework before purchasing and planting. These plants are long-lived which makes finding the right spot for them extremely important since you just might be enjoying them for the next 100 years!

	<u><i>Camellia japonica</i></u>	<u><i>Camellia sasanqua</i></u>
<u>Mature Size:</u>	10-20 feet tall & wide	3-15 feet tall & wide
<u>Growth Rate:</u>	Slow	Slow
<u>Plant Habit:</u>	varies with cultivar	varies; some groundcover cultivars available
<u>Exposure:</u>	Partial Shade – Shade	Sun – Partial Shade – Shade
<u>Soil Tolerances:</u>	Moderately drought tolerant; prefers medium-drained soils	
<u>Soil pH:</u>	Acidic – Slightly Acidic	Acidic – Slightly Acidic
<u>Maintenance:</u>	Easy/Low	Easy/Low
<u>Common Pests:</u>	Watch for scales, aphids, chewing insects and fungal diseases.	

The camellias planted at the Baker County Extension Office are perfect examples of the wide variety of cultivars available to plant lovers. The Yuletide Sasanqua Camellia (left) has single, fiery red blooms centered with



bright yellow stamens, making it a beautiful eye-catching addition to the winter landscape. The Mine-No-Yuki Sasanqua Camellia (right) has semi-double flowers that are rather prolific, covering the foliage like a blanket of snow. Both can be found blooming at the Ag Center during November and December.

References:

Park Brown, S. (1985). Camellias at a Glance. University of Florida. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep002>
 Wichman, T., Knox, G., Gilman, E., Sandrock, D., Schutzman, B., Alvarez, E., Schoellhorn, R., and Larson, B. (2006). *Florida-Friendly Plant List*. Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Handbook. University of Florida.

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