

Camellias thrive in the Puget Sound area when given proper care. Many varieties, especially sasanquas, will take full open sun if given proper watering, fertilizing, and mulching. Most varieties prefer morning sun or light shade, but they will take more sun if given excellent soil conditions and watering. Some flowers may bleach out in full sun and in hot weather. In dense shade, plants will become spindly and may not bloom. Avoid planting where heat might be reflected off walls or other structures such as concrete or rock.

Camellias prefer rich soil with good aeration, drainage, and water retention. If possible, work in at least 3 inches of Cedar Grove Compost, Gardener 'n' Bloome Soil Building Compost, or other organic matter in the entire bed before planting. These materials will improve sandy soil by helping to retain water and nutrients; heavy or clay soil will become lighter.

To plant your camellias, dig a hole 2 to 3 times as wide as the rootball. Loosen the soil in the bottom of the hole. Fill the hole with water and allow it to drain completely. Mix a good organic starter fertilizer with the soil, then place the plant in the hole so that the top of the rootball is just 1 to 2 inches above the soil level. Backfill with soil that has been mixed half and half with amendment. Firm the soil around the rootball and water thoroughly.

Build a basin around the plant with extra soil, making sure the surface of the basin is level with the surrounding soil. Cover the soil inside the basin with a mulch of compost or bark to hold moisture and discourage weed growth.

Camellias can be planted almost any time of the year, even when they are in full bloom. The exceptions are extremely hot, dry, or cold periods.

Water newly planted camellias deeply about once a week during summer and fall, more often in very warm weather. When the top couple of inches of soil are dry, it's time to water.

Camellias, like most shrubs and trees, do best with thorough, infrequent watering so that they can use the water they have before getting more. This also allows more air circulation in the soil, which is particularly important for camellias. After the third year in the ground, camellias usually thrive on a deep soaking 2 to 3 times a month.

Regular feeding is helpful for camellias. You can use an organic azalea-type fertilizer. For spring-blooming camellias, fertilize after bloom: for fall bloomers, fertilize in late summer. Follow package instructions.