

Growing Camellias in Your Garden

Text and Photos by Daniel and Carolyn Low



Camellia japonica 'Lovelight'

As a starting point we considered two factors as a priority. Firstly, which camellia species could be selected to choose from in Australia and secondly, what special conditions could affect camellia growing in a home garden.



Camellia higo 'Hinomaru'

There are six main species of camellia, although overlaps may occur because species such as *heimalis* and *vernalis* are sometimes grouped with *sasanqua*.

1. species; those that are the same as their parents growing in the various regions of Asia.
2. sasanqua; usually identified by their smaller leaves and are able to withstand most climatic conditions.
3. japonica; larger leaved types and generally larger, showy blooms.
4. higo; the flower of the Samurai. These single flowers are identified by their central boss of many stamens which may number up to 130.
5. reticulata; the real showgirls of the genera. Flowers range in size from 8cm to well over 15cm in diameter; many of cake plate size.
6. hybrid; consist of many medium sized types but there are also the miniature hybrids which are grown for their long sprays or magnificent clusters.



Camellia sasanqua 'Fragrant Joy'

Before selecting camellias for your garden it is best to carry out a site analysis. You don't have to be a professional landscape designer to do so. However, it will be easier to do so if you set out a rough plan of the area, to a scale, on some sketching paper. You can measure out distances in paces (your own) and use them as the scale for the drawing.

The first point to consider is the microclimate in the part of the garden where you will be planting. Firstly we always look at the orientation of the sun during the day and over the seasons as it is needed to



Camellia yuhsienensis

stimulate growth and create food for all parts of the shrub/tree. Then we look at the shade and shelter surrounding and above the space. Will there be shade from other trees, buildings and fences etc? And could they also create a wind tunnel effect contrary to the normal prevailing winds during the year?

Is the ground flat or sloping and will it creates a situation where cold frosty air might funnel down making a pool of cold air in the winter? Finally, we assess the soil.



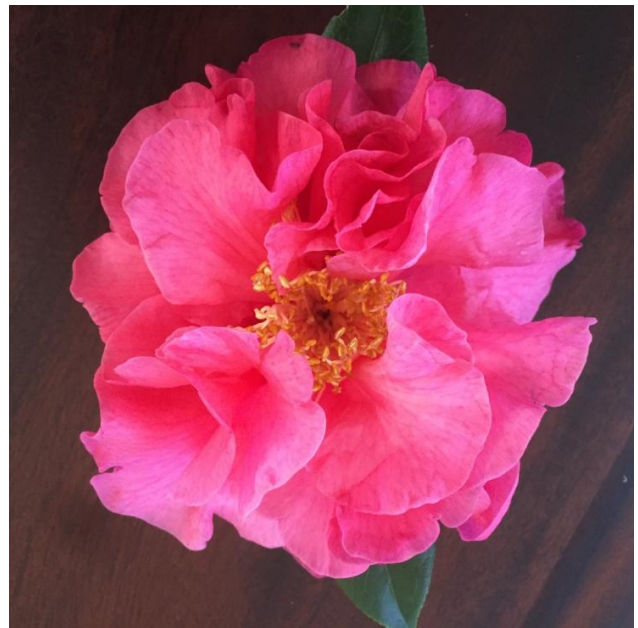
Camellia X williamsii hybrid
'Margaret Waterhouse'

Different soil types require different treatments for optimal camellia growth. Camellias prefer a well-drained soil. If water collects in the planting hole camellias will drown very quickly and by the time you see a problem it may be too late, so test drainage with a bucket of water prior to planting out.

Camellias also do best in a slightly acid soil so using a pH testing kit (easy to use and available from most nurseries at a relatively low cost) will determine the treatment necessary to rectify a problem. Good nurseries can provide professional advice to their valued customers.

When you are digging the hole, carefully inspect the soil you are removing. If you are near other plants they may be being attacked by Curl Grubs and other pests.

It is now time to select the plant for the place. Before choosing your species and variety take a walk around your locality in the flowering season. Keep an eye out for camellias which look healthy and with flowers you are drawn to.



Camellia reticulata 'Howard Asper'

Should you select a plant in the nursery that is different from any in your district it may be that they prefer a different soil and microclimate than is in your garden. If you see one in a neighbour's garden, politely ask them what variety it is and if it requires special care to look so good. Fellow gardeners are a friendly bunch and would usually be only too pleased to assist.

When selecting a plant in a nursery, to ask where they are sourced. Nurseries ship plants from all over Australia and in their nursery and for some time at their new location they will seem to be doing well. It may take up to a year for the plant to gradually remember that it came from a cool place in Gippsland and a sunny summer in a northern climate is not to its liking. You may have to use shadecloth for some time to acclimatise your new plant to its new home, gradually getting it used to your home.

Try to buy plants in flower because mix-ups occur in large nurseries and the name on the label may not be the same as the actual flower.