



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Camellia japonica*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Japanese Camellia is best known for its lovely white, red, pink, or variegated flowers, two to five inches across, blooming from fall to spring in warmer areas and in early spring in cooler areas (Fig. 1). A compact growing habit, glossy green foliage, and a showy profusion of bloom account for the wide popularity of this large, handsome, long-lived shrub.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Camellia japonica*

**Pronunciation:** kuh-MEEL-ee-uh juh-PAW-nick-uh

**Common name(s):** Common Camellia

**Family:** *Theaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** screen; border; specimen; container or above-ground planter; espalier; foundation; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### Description

**Height:** 7 to 12 feet

**Spread:** 5 to 10 feet

**Plant habit:** oval

**Plant density:** moderate



Figure 1. Common Camellia.

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

#### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** serrate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

#### Flower

**Flower color:** orange; pink; red; yellow; lavender

**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; winter flowering

#### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit cover:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

#### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

### Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; sand; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam;

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

### Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Camellias can create an effective screen, although they are slow-growing. They may look best when staggered in an informal mass and not simply lined up in a hedgelike manner. Because of their preference for light shade and acid soils, Camellias make good companions for pines, magnolias, and other large, shade-casting trees. Camellias are ideal for planting at the edge of a natural area where their flowers and greenery accent the open spaces under the tree canopy. A single Camellia can make a good accent for an entry, provided the plant has sufficient room to grow. They can be pruned to a single trunk and the lower branches can be removed to create a novelty plant. Trained as a multi-trunked tree, Japanese Camellia makes a wonderful accent with its exfoliating, twisted, muscular stems.

Some flower bud dropping may be natural; many Camellias set more buds than they can open. Some bud drop can be caused by overwatering, more by underwatering, especially during summer, or by spells of very low humidity. Limit pruning to removing dead or damaged wood, unproductive branches, and disproportionately long shoots, if you wish. Shearing spoils the naturally attractive shape of the Camellia. Prune right after flowering or during early summer to stimulate branching. Pruning later in the year can remove flower buds.

Some of the popular cultivars include: 'Betty Sheffield Supreme', white flower petals with a deep pink to red border; 'Pink Perfection' with small, delicate pink, rose-form blooms; and 'Purity' with pure white, medium rose-form blooms. There are many, many others.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Mites can infest the flower buds and cause them to fall off the plant before they open. Watch for scale infestations.

### Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.