



The Diverse Camellia

Garth Jacober, Owner, Mt. Diablo Nursery & Garden, Master Gardener

Garth worked for 14 years with David Feathers, a renowned camellia grower on his camellia estate in Lafayette.

The first mention of camellias can be traced back to China in the years 500 to 700AD. *Camellia Sinensis* was grown for its leaves and made into tea. Camellia plants migrated to Europe by way of Portugal, in the first half of the sixteenth century thru trade routes with China. Tea was introduced to America when *Camellia Sinesis* plants were brought to Georgia in the year 1749. To this day this camellia species is grown in the southeast for tea which has experienced a large resurgence in the United States in last 10 years.

There are three species of camellias. The first and probably most familiar is the *Camellia Japonica*. It is characterized by compact and rapid growth. Flowers are red, pink or white. These plants can have a round formal shape or a spreading growth. Examples include pink Debutante, red Blood of China, and white Nuccio's Gem. *Camellia Reticulata* is a stronger heavier grower and is characterized by a loose and rangy growth habit, sometimes described as leggy. Colors include magenta and fuschia. *Camellia Sasanqua* is a fall bloomer and a great landscape plant. It can bloom from September through January. Flowers can be white, pink and red. Growth habit is upright or cascading. Many sasanqua camellias have a strong fragrance.

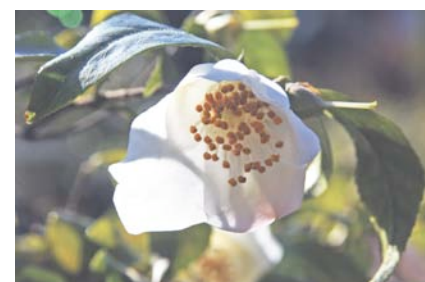
Camellias grown in gardens east of the Caldecott Tunnel should be protected from hot afternoon sun and located in areas with morning light. Soil conditions for growing camellias should be slightly acidic, rich in humus and organic matter. All clay soil needs to be amended, as good drainage is critical for all camellias. Top dressing or mulching with a quality acidic soil amendment will provide healthy plants and beautiful blooms. Frequent watering with

a combination of overhead and deep soaking is ideal. Camellias should be fed twice a year. Use an acidic fertilizer after they bloom and apply another application in September or October of 0-10-10. Some serious growers fertilize 3 times a year, especially if the camellias are grown in containers. Cottonseed meal may be used in combination with a 0-10-10 or an organic acidic fertilizer. Camellias should be pruned after they bloom in combination with feeding. Prune for structure, to eliminate dead wood, and to create space for sunlight and air movement.

Camellias in general tend to be fairly pest resistant. Aphids will appear from time to time on new growth. Application of a soapy water mix or safer soap will usually solve the problem. In some situations ants tend aphids and feed on the honeydew aphids excrete. At the same time, they protect the aphids from natural enemies. If you see ants crawling up an aphid infested plant, put a band of sticky material (tanglefoot, etc.) around the trunk to prevent ants from getting up.

Camellia petal blight is a disease that is the result of infection by a fungus. The flowers are the only part of the plant affected by this disease. Small brown spots located at the base of the flower enlarge until the entire flower is brown. There is no known cure or spray for this disease. To minimize its effects, sanitation is the best answer. Pick up all diseased flowers off the ground and dispose in green waste recycling, do not compost.

There are many different varieties of camellias available. New hybrids that have been introduced in the last ten years have provided the camellia world with new colors, fragrance and unique flowers. Take a moment and see if a camellia can be added to your garden for you to enjoy.



Photos provided by Garth Jacober



Garth Jacober and his wife Marcia own Mt. Diablo Nursery & Garden located at 3295 Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette. He can be reached at 283-3830 or info@mtdiablonursery.com.