REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Camellia sinensis
Tea Camellia

A Garden Guide



Tea Camellia (*Camellia sinensis*) are evergreen plants originally from China, where they have been cultivated for their foliage and flowers for at least 2700 years. Tea Camellia are plants of great cultural and medicinal significance in many East and South Asian countries. Before there were Starbucks, there were teahouses. Globally, tea is the second most widely consumed beverage, after water. Plants, if well cared for, can live over a hundred years.

Green, black, oolong, white, and other teas are all derived from *Camellia sinensis* - they are simply harvested and processed in different ways. However, only teas made from the *Camellia sinensis* plant are considered to be true teas. Herbal teas do not contain any actual tea, and are better termed herbal infusions or tisanes, to prevent confusion.

Pollination: Since Tea Camellias are grown for the fresh foliage and buds, only one plant is required. It is pollinated by bees, who find the flowers attractive.

Siting: Here in WNC, Tea Camellias perform best with morning sunlight, and afternoon shade. Full sun will burn and discolor the plants. They benefit from protection, especially winter winds, and do well planted against houses and rock walls. Avoid planting down in a frost pocket, midway on a slope is ideal.

Soil and Planting: Tea Camellias prefer a pH of 5.0-6.0, with moist, well-draining soil. Usually in our soils, they will need at least 1/3rd soil conditioner, up to 1/3rd rich composts, mixed with our native clay. Gently applying mycorrhizae directly to the roots, just prior to planting, will improve plant resilience. Dig a hole 2-3x as wide as the pot, only as deep as the pot, plant the Tea Camellias in the soil at the same height as it was in the pot. Apply 2-3" of mulch to the root zone, do not let it touch the trunk or any woody roots that might be visible.

Fertilizing: Tea Camellias benefit from fertilizers designed for acid-loving plants, and from higher levels of Nitrogen. Happy Frog® Acid Loving Plants Fertilizer, Espoma Holly-tone®, and Symphony Organic Fertilizer are all good choices. Compost tea is a wonderful snack for your plants in the spring and summer.

Watering: Water newly planted shrubs immediately after planting, and as needed throughout the growing season.

Organic Spray Schedule: Tea Camellias have few significant disease and pest issues, especially when sited correctly, in partial shade with good drainage and winter protection. For pest issues that might arise, Horticultural Oil, Neem Oil, or Insecticidal Soap are good options. If fungal issues arise, such as Camellia Canker, prune to promote air circulation, remove diseased parts, and spray with Copper if necessary.

Pruning: Plants are pruned to 4-5' just before spring to keep the plants easy to harvest and to encourage production of fresh new growth tips.

Harvesting: Beginning in spring, plants are harvested as the leaves emerge, every two weeks. Slower growing leaves are considered to have better flavor. To harvest, pluck the two outermost leaves and leaf buds, or the top 2" of fresh growth, from branch tips of mature plants. The leaves begin to wilt and oxidize if not quickly dried. Different types of teas are made by different processing methods.

Processing for Green Tea:

1. Pluck the two outermost leaves and leaf buds.
2. Blot everything dry, and let them dry in the shade for a few hours.
3. Steam the leaves (in a steamer basket) on your stove for about a minute.
4. Spread the leaves on a baking sheet and dry them in the oven at 200 - 250 F for 20 minutes.
5. Store the dried tea leaves in an opaque, air-tight container.

Processing for Black Tea:

1. Pluck the two outermost leaves and leaf buds.
2. Roll the leaves between your hands and crush them until the leaves start to darken and turn red.
3. Spread them out on a tray, and leave them in a cool location for 2 to 3 days. Dry them in the oven at 200 - 250 F for about 20 minutes.
4. Store the tea leaves in an opaque, air-tight container.

We carry many herbs and edible flowers that can be added to your tea, such as Jasmine, Hibiscus, Rose, and Mint.

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