

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 11-02-05) Camellias © 2005

North end gardener Judy Hight brought camellia seeds to the Poulsbo Farmers Market for the Master Gardeners to identify. The seeds were green and looked like small apples. None of us had seen this before but it's often common on camellias especially in warmer climates. We just don't always notice it here because the seeds begin forming in late August and usually drop and disappear from the plant by October. We don't seem to be checking on our camellias at its time of year.

I googled "camellia seed" and found several websites with helpful information about this part of the plants' growth. The International Camellia Society website http://camellia-ics.org/_ics/descript/seed.htm gave a three page description of the seeds and how the seeds emerge. Klaus Peper, the botanist who wrote the article gives tips on getting camellias to grow by propagating the seeds. Sometimes the seeds from *Camellia japonica* (the most common varieties in our area) turn red like small apples if the plant is in the sun. Most literature says camellias are most easily propagated from cuttings. If you have seeds on your camellia and would like to try your luck you can visit the above website. If you do not have Internet access please call the Extension Office at 360-337-7157 and our staff can send you a copy of the Internet article on growing camellias from seed.

For abundant information and temptingly colorful photos of various camellia varieties visit <http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/camellias/camellia.asp> (the Royal Horticulture Society website); or www.camellias-acg.org/ the American Camellia Society).

Camellia japonica is the variety we most often see here in the Pacific Northwest. These camellias bloom from March through May in our gardens depending on sun exposure and age of the plant. Camellias rarely have problems. Sometimes the leaves get coated with algae (looks like yellow-green coating on the leaves). It doesn't harm the plant and can be wiped off if you have to. Camellias, like all evergreen plants, lose about a third of their leaves each year. The leaves turn yellow and drop to the ground. Clean them up and compost them.

A somewhat newer variety available in our area is called *Camellia sasanqua*, smaller in stature (perfect for container plantings) and blooms in late fall to early winter. *Camellia sasanqua* 'Bonanza' is a low growing two-foot tall ground cover camellia. I haven't found it here yet but it sounds intriguing.

If you can grow rhodies, azaleas, blueberries, huckleberries or heathers in your garden then camellias will grow there too. Like all plants you'll need to water camellias regularly their first two or three years in your garden until the plants become established. Camellias prefer dappled shade. Avoid direct sun for most varieties but there are a few that love lots of sunlight. Ask your favorite nursery person for recommendations. You'll find camellias with flowers in shades of white, pink, red and sometimes yellow. Some varieties have striped flowers. *Sasanquas* are available now with light fragrances. They'd make a great container plant on a front porch or entryway.

If you're a tea drinker you may realize that tea often comes from *Camellia sinensis* (tea plant). This camellia has white flowers at the axils that look like a hibiscus. This camellia relative will not grow outside in our climate but you may want to try growing it in a greenhouse or as a houseplant in a sunny window. Some people grow *Camellia sinensis* and hibiscus together and harvest the plant parts to make an herbal tea and caffeine tea variation. Visit <http://coffeetea.about.com/od/preparation/a/growingtea.htm> to find out how to grow and harvest your own tea if you want to be adventurous and patient.

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