

Tea Camellia (*Camellia sinensis*)

Exposure: Full sun to light shade. Protect from winter wind. Zones 6-8.

Soil: Prefers acidic (pH 4.5-6.5) well-drained garden soil.

Growth habits: Tea camellia makes a pretty evergreen bush from 3-6' tall and wide, though they can grow larger if left unpruned.

Landscape uses: Hedges, specimen plants, foundation plantings and shrub borders. Tea camellia is a beautiful evergreen shrub with shiny dark green leaves with 1" fragrant white or pink flowers in November and December.

Edible/Medicinal properties: Leaves. This is the tea of commerce and can produce green, white, or black tea depending on how it is processed. Tea contains many medicinal compounds besides caffeine and is loaded with anti-oxidant and cancer fighting compounds.

Pollination: Self-fertile, but it doesn't really matter because tea is made from the leaves.



Caring for your tea camellias

Pruning: Prune as you do most shrubs - removing any diseased or damaged wood, and crossing branches. Frequent harvesting of new growth for tea will keep the plant more compact. We like to pinch off the new growth with our fingers to harvest the leaves.

Watering: The tea camellia will likely need to be watered deeply once a week if there isn't enough rain.

Fertilization: Tea camellias like regular fertilization every six weeks during the growing season - approximately early April, mid-May, and late June. Use a fertilizer for acid-loving plants. If the leaves aren't dark green, they might benefit from iron and sulfur.

Frequently asked questions about tea camellias

How do you make tea?

We generally pick the tender tips and most recent 3 or 4 leaves when they have fully developed and just dry them at room temperature out of the sun. This is technically white tea and makes a delightful aromatic cup of tea. If you steam and then dry the leaves, you can make green tea. If you then ferment or oxidize the leaves, you can make black tea, but it's unlikely that you will have enough leaves from a few plants to make black tea. See the videos on the UPN website for harvesting and tea making tips.

My tea camellia lost all its leaves this winter. Is it OK?

If tea camellias are exposed to cold winter winds, they will lose their leaves. If the plant is still alive, the leaves will grow back in spring. Consider protecting the camellia from winter winds, especially while it's small, either by constructing a wind break or wrapping it in a winter protection blanket.

Additional information

See the Useful Plants Nursery website at www.usefulplants.org for videos demonstrating planting and other plant care techniques.