

# Planting Camellias Outdoors In Moderate Climates

Camellias can be planted outdoors in milder climates. A part-sun part-shade environment works best and camellias should be protected from afternoon sun. They are not as sensitive to cold weather as most plants can be and have been known to grow as far north as Climate zone 7 and even some warmer parts of zone 6. The main thing to keep in mind with Camellia plants is that they absolutely will not tolerate wet feet or planting too deeply.

Before planting outdoors, make sure you find the perfect location. Part sun/shade or filtered sun is the best light for camellias of all types. Evergreen or deciduous trees with a high canopy provide excellent shade from intense summer sun and are an excellent choice. Also trees that drop leaves such as Elms, or Pines provide a much needed organic mulch that over time will provide your plants with nutrients as well as protection from drought and cold.

If you are going to be watering with an irrigation system, make the proper adjustments or add additional nozzles or heads to provide water to your new planting. This is a seen a lot easier before you plant, so turn on your system, and see what you will need for the spot.

Camellias like a very well draining soil that will hold some moisture, but not wet or mucky that contains organic matter. (decomposed leaves etc.) much like you would find in a forest setting where leaves and debris compost down for a very rich, but moist soil.

For very sandy soil, you can add peat or compost to add more organic matter. For clay soils, adding a soil conditioner (usually a finely ground aged bark matter) will break up the clay and provide better oxygen and moisture to the roots.

Your garden soil also needs to be acid. Usually you will find acid soils in areas where organic matter such as composted leaves have fallen. But to be sure, have your soil tested. It's much easier to correct an issue at



Camellia sasanqua 'Our Linda' in the garden

the beginning instead of having plants that perform poorly from the start. The ideal pH range for camellias is 5.5 to 6.5. Improper pH ranges can cause nutrient deficiencies resulting in poor or no new growth, spindly plants, leaf loss, yellowing leaves, poor bud development, disease, insect infections and if left untreated, death of the plant.

## Planting of Camellias outdoors

Things you may need:

*Shovel*

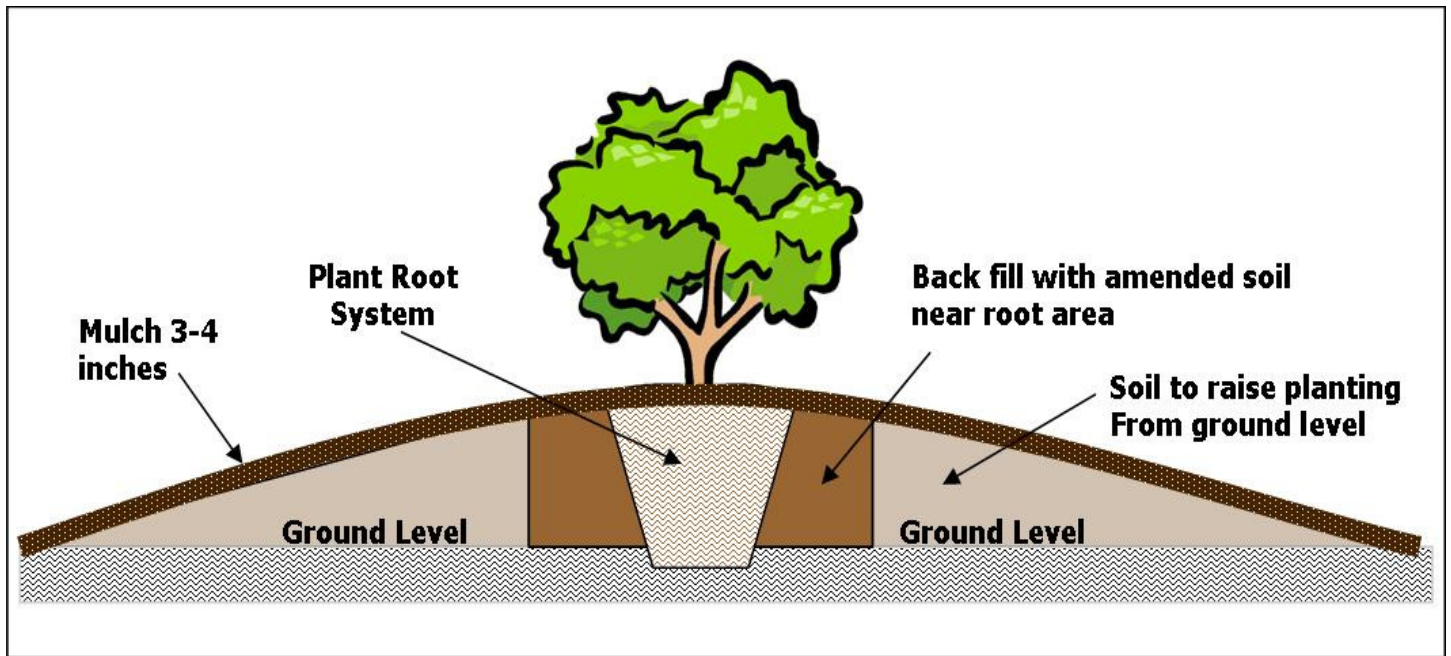
*Hand Trowel*

*Axe or loppers for cutting roots in soil*

*Soil amendments (peat, sand, or compost)*

*Mulch*

- Begin by preparing the site for your camellia.
- Rake back any existing mulch
- Dig a hole about twice as wide and deep as your container removing the soil that will be used as back fill when you plant. If you are planting on a slope, make a well around the lowest part of the slope to keep water from running off as fast.
- Amend the soil with whatever matter you may need (Peat, soil or compost or material for pH correc-



tion) depending on your soil condition. This will be used as Backfill.

- Remove most of the larger roots from trees or other shrubs that have grown into the area..
- Measure the hole with the plant still in it's container. You want to make sure the surface of the root ball of the plant is at or above the ground level. Either add soil back or take more soil out of the hole until the proper level is achieved. (See Diagram above)
- Take your plant out of it's container. This usually can be done by putting one hand on the root surface near the stem and the other hand on the bottom of the pot. Gently remove the pot from the plant.
- If the roots of the plant are tight and wound around the root mass, you can either take your fingers or a hand trowel and loosen up the roots that are tight. You can even take a knife and make vertical cuts in the roots, this will not hurt the plant, but will make them start to grow outward.
- Put your plant in the hole, once again checking levels of the hole making sure it is at or slightly above ground level. You want to avoid the plant sinking down or over time settling down where the roots fall well below ground level.
- Pack your backfill soil around the sides of the plants making sure you're tightly packing it. Continue until you reach the top of the plant.
- Don't put any dirt or soil on the top of the root ball. This is to make sure that when you water or fertilize, that nutrients and moisture are getting to the roots and not running off. Putting soil on the top of the root mass could cause suffocation and the plant could die if not done properly. Mulch on top is great, but not soil.
- Mulch the plants well with 2-3 layers of either bark mulch, straw, leaves, or compost. Use decomposable matter, not synthetic mulches like rubber bark or straw. It might look pretty but does nothing for the health of your plants. Rock mulch should be avoided as well.
- Water your plant and the area well, and let it drain.
- Fertilize during the active growing season (usually March-September depending on where you live. Replenish mulch when it begins to deplete and if you have added soil pH corrective matter, check your pH once per year.