



Plant of the Week

Camellia



Being a good public servant, *Camellia* is a plant of great significance to me. Where would I be without my cuppa? Tea comes from *Camellia sinensis*, a close relative of the splendid garden flowers that do so well in Sydney. In

China, the tea plant is known as 茶花

(pronounced “Cha Hua”, literally “Tea Flower”). Tea plants have small, creamy white flowers and are pruned into long, low hedges.

Very high levels of caffeine in tea leaves are the result of many centuries of selection and breeding to indulge the tastes of tea drinkers.



Tea plantation in western Java
(under Australian Silky Oak trees)

In the wild, Camellias can be found in many countries of south-east Asia, including China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Korea and even Indonesia. A few decades ago, the most popular *Camellia* in Sydney would have been *Camellia japonica* (Japanese Camellia), which has large red, pink or white flowers in a huge range of different shapes, from simple, 5 petalled single flowers through to tight, waterlily formal doubles and casual, blousy informal doubles.



In recent times, however, plants of *Camellia sasanqua* have

Camellia sasanqua
'Jennifer Susan'
(camelliasrus.com.au)

taken Australian gardens by storm, favoured as a hardy hedging plant with an abundance of flowers in late autumn through to winter. In fact, in North

America it is often known as the “Christmas Camellia”.

Camellia reticulata are the most decadent floosies in the *Camellia* family, flaunting obscenely large flowers, usually in the brightest of colours, red, cyclamen and rich pink.

In contrast, **Williamsii hybrids**, are the aristocrats. They have the most beautiful, elegant flowers, with the palest of pink petals. These lovely gems are the result of crosses between *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia saluenensis* from western China.

Additional images:

Camellia Williamsii hybrid 'E.G. Waterhouse' (top left): www.lovecam.org

Camellia sinensis (tea) (top right): www.bestteaandhoney.com

Tea plantation: A.J. Downing

Production: A.J. Downing & K.D. Downing

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Camellia reticulata
(camellias-acrs.org)

Downing Herbarium, Department of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University.