

## Camellia Propagation

A brief description of propagation methods. More information is available on the American Camellia Society website.

**SEEDS:** Growing plants from seed presents the gardening enthusiast with a real challenge. Camellias do not come true from seed and very rarely is a good flower produced from seed. Out of many seedlings, the chances for a superior variety are very slim. Seeds can be allowed to germinate in moist soil and grown uncovered or covered.

**AIRLAYERING:** Air layering is a method of reproducing camellias from a living branch. It may be done at any time of the year, but the best time is in the spring when the plants are actively growing. At this time the bark is easily removed. Air layering is based upon the centuries-old propagating process developed by the Chinese of layering (rooting) plants by placing sections of branches that are still attached to the plant in the ground and covering them with earth, having first removed or roughed the bark on the underside. Air layering is a simple variation of this layering where the rooting medium is sphagnum moss in the air rather than on the ground.

**CUTTINGS:** Growth from cuttings is accomplished by rooting a small leading growth stem to produce a sample or scion. They should be taken soon after the tender new growth matures and hardens (May - August). Cuttings of approximately the last 5 leaves are long enough. Cuttings should be placed in rooting media and a covering of glass or plastic placed over the pot to retain moisture. Intermittent mist is used by nurserymen to prevent drying out. When cuttings are well rooted, usually mid-to-late winter, transfer them to pots or plant in a protected bed. Not all camellias root readily from cuttings, but with good facilities, bottom heat, intermittent mist, and rooting hormones almost any camellia can be rooted successfully.

**GRAFTING:** The scion, or part of the stem of the variety one wishes to propagate, should be taken from mature current season's growth and have one or more growth buds, generally with three or more leaves. The best season to graft is late winter to early spring, just before new growth begins. Camellia sasanqua or camellia oleifera is often used as understock, the plant that furnishes the root system, because it grows vigorously and is resistant to root rot. Cleft grafting is the most popular method of grafting. The understock should be prepared by cutting off the top about three inches above the soil. A vertical incision should be made with a sharp knife about an inch down. Prepare the scion by making a wedge-shaped cut at the base. Hold the slit open in the understock with a screwdriver or knife. Insert the prepared scion so that the cambium layers (green layer immediately inside the bark) on the scion and understock will match. The union point may be protected with grafting wax, pruning compound, wet sand, or aluminum foil. A covering such as a glass jar, milk jug, soft drink bottle, or large styrofoam cup should be used to cover the graft and keep the humidity high. It is also desirable to cover the soil with an inch of sand to ensure a tight fit of the top covering. The grafted plant should be protected from direct sunlight. Callusing should start within a few weeks and in two months be firmly knit. When firmly callused, the jar can be raised gradually. This is the most critical phase of aftercare. Grafts may grow 15 - 30 inches the first season. Fertilize lightly with a liquid or not at all the first year.