

CAMELLIAS

(Camellia japonica)

for the
Farmer Florist



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
EXTENSION

INTRODUCTION

Camellia japonica, commonly known as the Japanese camellia, is a beautiful and versatile flowering plant that is popular among farmer florists for its vibrant blooms and glossy evergreen foliage. Some plants have variegated foliage, which is caused by a virus that does not harm the plant. If you are looking to add these beautiful plants to your farm or garden, it is important to understand their production requirements, soil and fertility needs, and their moisture and light requirements. This guide will help you successfully grow *C. japonica*.

PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

C. japonica is a slow-growing shrub that can reach heights up to 15 feet. It is best propagated from cuttings or air layering, as seeds can take several years to germinate. Many are often grafted. When planting *C. japonica*, ensure that the plants are spaced at least 4–6 feet apart to allow for proper air circulation and sunlight exposure. *C. japonica* blooms in late winter to early spring, producing large, showy flowers in shades of pink, red, white, and lavender. There are also variegated blooms.

SOIL AND FERTILITY NEEDS

This plant thrives in acidic soil with a pH level between 5.0 and 6.5. It is crucial to test the soil before

planting to ensure it meets these requirements. If the soil is too alkaline, you can lower the pH by adding sulfur. *C. japonica* also benefits from regular fertilization with a balanced fertilizer that is high in nitrogen and contains micronutrients such as iron and magnesium. Fertilize the plants in late spring to early summer before new growth begins and fertilize again in late winter to promote blooming.

MOISTURE AND LIGHT REQUIREMENTS

C. japonica thrives in moist, well-drained soil and benefits from regular watering, particularly during dry periods. However, it is important not to overwater, as camellias are susceptible to root rot. Mulching around the base of the plant can help retain moisture and regulate soil temperature. They also require partial shade to full shade, as exposure to direct sunlight can burn the leaves and fade the flowers. Plant camellias in a location that receives filtered sunlight or morning sun with afternoon shade.

HARVEST AND POST-HARVEST

Use sharp pruning shears to harvest camellia flowers. Floral designers who use flowers on branches for arrangements and handtied bouquets will need stem lengths of 12–18 inches. Since camellias are a novelty

crop that is virtually unknown in the floral marketplace, it is essential to inform buyers about the bunch size and details such as flower color, stem length, number of stems, and the minimum number of open flowers. These flowers can be sold in 5-stem or 10-stem bunches with the same number of open flowers. Retail florists rely on bunches containing all the same color of flowers, so any variation from the farm should be communicated to potential buyers ahead of purchase.

It is also possible to sell the flower heads in lots of 10, with approximately 1 inch of stem attached. These should be dry packed in plastic bags, then boxed to prevent mechanical injury. Ensure that the plastic bag is large enough to accommodate the blooms, so that the film does not touch or rest on the surfaces of the flower petals.

Cut camellia stems can be stored in buckets or vases filled with fresh flower food solution. Both the stems and dry-packed flower heads should be refrigerated and sold within a few days.

Growing camellias can be a rewarding experience for farmer florists looking to add a splash of color to their gardens or floral arrangements. By following these guidelines for production, soil and fertility needs, and moisture and light requirements, you can ensure that your plants thrive and bloom year after year.

DESIGN APPLICATIONS

Perhaps the easiest way to display cut camellia flowers is to float them in a bowl of water. Select glass, ceramic, or metal bowls on hand or bowls that coordinate to the setting. Simply drop the flowers onto the water surface. Depending on the temperature in the room, this design can last from two to six days.



A larger display can be made using multiple bowls and flowers. We grouped like flowers together for focal impact.



Camellia japonica varieties mixed with cut ornamental foliage are arranged in an antique basket and adorn a church altar. Design and image by Tina Knoll, Master Floral Designer.



A large bowl allows the water to be seen as an element in the design.



A handtied bouquet (stems visible within the vase) of camellias mixed with ivy (*Hedera helix*) is ready to be carried down the aisle by a bride.



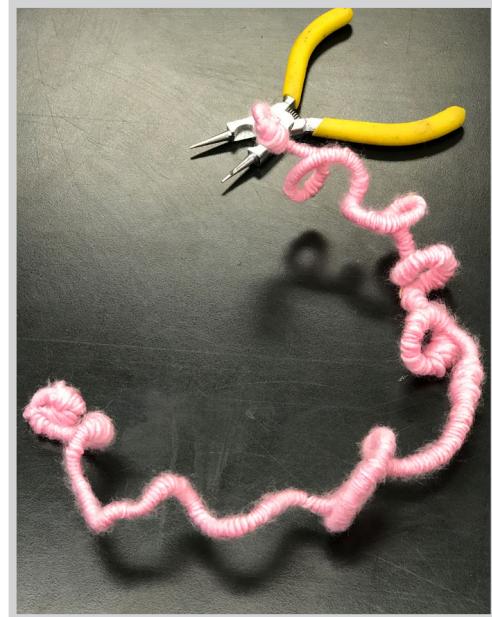
Unknown *Camellia japonica* cultivar



The same bouquet after 24 hours at room temperature display.

Camellia Crown

A camellia flower crown can easily be made using just a few supplies. Due to the size and weight of these showy flowers, a wire armature is used as a foundation. The flowers are attached to the frame with cold glue.



For this design, you will need #12-gauge aluminum craft wire, yarn, bobby pins, cold glue, scissors, jewelry pliers, and assorted camellias, camellia foliage, and accent flowers, if desired.

Step 1

Cut the wire to a length of approximately 30 inches (76 centimeters). Crimp the cut ends of the wire in place to avoid scratches, then wrap the strand with yarn, covering the entire length. The yarn increases the surface area of the armature, providing extra grip to hold the flowers in place.

Bunch the yarn in place so that it completely covers any exposed wire. Wrap the yarn-covered wire around a dowel, broomstick, or your finger to make an irregular spring. Coil the ends of the armature into flat curls.

Many floral designers speed up the yarn-wrapping process by clamping the wire to an electric drill. Using a slow speed, wind the yarn onto the wire and fasten the yarn to the wire ends using a glue dot. This method will significantly reduce the time required to complete the armature.





Step 2

Flatten the entire armature into an elongated plane.

Step 3

Using cold glue, adhere camellia blossoms to the frame. In this example, the flowers are arranged with the smallest at the ends and the largest toward the center.



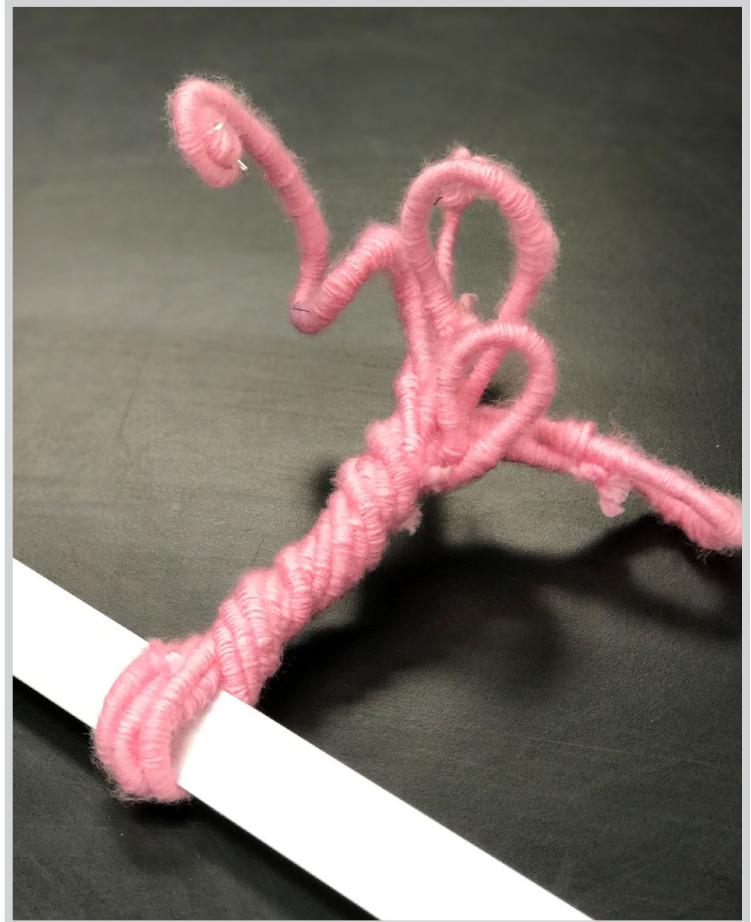
Step 4

A few camellia leaves can be glued onto the frame as accents. Coat the finished design with antitranspirant spray. Store it in a plastic bag and refrigerate. Because the design's armature is malleable wire, the design can easily be formed into a semicircle. It can then be held in the hair with bobby pins.

This flower crown example is fit for Mary Todd Lincoln! Springtime Narcissus were added as a floral accent.

Camellia Bouquet

Building on the armature and glue technique, it is easy to create a stunning bouquet featuring Mississippi-grown camellias.



Step 1

Using the same wire and yarn materials, we created a larger armature and formed a handle by winding the covered wires using a yardstick. The upper portion of the armature wires are kept in curves but flattened into a plane.





Step 2

Using cold glue, attach the smallest camellia blooms to the edge of the round plane. Many of the flowers are on short stems and still have their foliage attached. Do not be concerned about glue smudges. They can be covered with additional flowers or foliage.



Step 3

As a final step, add blooms and leaves to the underside of the armature's plane. These placements ensure that all angles of the bouquet are decorative. Coat the design with antitranspirant spray, place it in a plastic bag (such as a dry cleaner bag), and refrigerate until use.

Our finished camellia bouquet. This would be perfect for debutante appearances, including Mardi Gras balls, early winter weddings, or occasions that call for floral bouquet presentations during the camellia flower season.

REFERENCE

American Camellia Society. <https://www.americancamellias.com/>



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By **James M. DelPrince**, PhD, AIFD, PFCI, Associate Extension Professor, and Christine Coker, PhD, former Extension/Research Professor, Coastal Research and Extension Center.

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