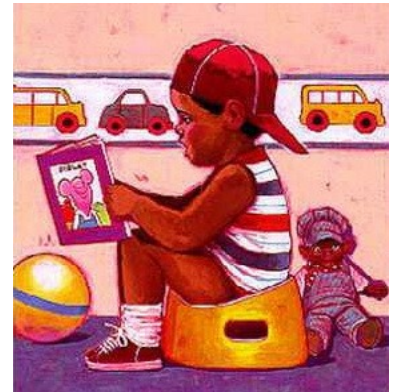


# GOING POTTY OVER CAMELIAS

By Barry Johnson ©

Together with an ever-shrinking world and contents of our wallets due to the global recession, garden spaces are also declining. This can be due to the influences of the drought or, the downsizing of living spaces. With unit-style occupancies on the increase, smaller, courtyard style gardens are in vogue. The camellia is ideally suited for these applications as they generally love living in containers. Being evergreen plants they provide an element of lushness to any courtyard and not only act as flowering/foilage feature plants but also serve to horticulturally soften the 'boxiness' of the these environs.

Camellias slower growth rates and refined root systems make them one of the easiest plants to use in pot culture. Combining this with their pruneability and you can understand why they are a popular choice for this application. Using the winter-flowering camellias with other plants will provide year round seasonality without the winter months being bereft of interest. Hence, your courtyard, patio or house environs will always be attractive.



*Camellias in the compact courtyard garden*

you need to pick the right camellia cultivar for its intended position. For heavily shaded spots cultivars such as Illumination, Fiona Capp, Gwenneth Moray, Sweet Emile Kate, Marge Miller, Snow, Magnoliaeflora, the Elegans family eg. Elegans Champagne; E. Supreme; E. Splendor and Jury family eg. Mona Jury; Elsie Jury. Fragrant cultivars such as Cinnamon Cindy and Scentuous would also add another sensory dimension. The 'sunnier' positions will need tougher cultivars but, you also have to take into account any reflected or radiated heat from nearby walls and fences in the more exposed and enclosed environs. 'Colourbond'-type steel fences can be notorious for retaining and radiating heat.

Cultivars of Japonica, smaller, compact Hybrids and Sasanquas are ideal candidates for potted culture. The Reticulatas are not suitable for container culture due to their larger and more open growth habits. Some of the larger, lax-growing sasanquas can be problematic if space allotments don't allow for their free-form habits. However, they can be accommodated by espaliering them against a fence, wall or frame.

The micro-climates in your courtyard or intended growing allotment (eg. sun versus shade) can vary quite markedly therefore,



*Frame-grown sasanqua*





*Illumination*



*Fiona Capp*

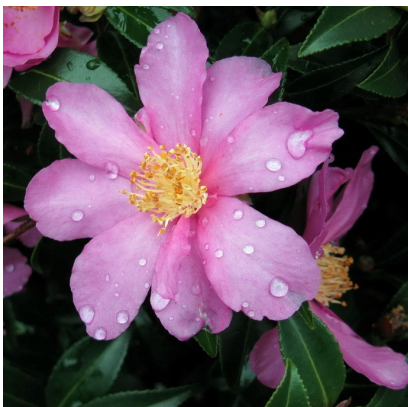


*Marge Miller*

More exposed sites may be unsuitable for potted camellias unless you can make provision for overhead shading. This can be artificial, by means of shade cloth etc. (not polycarbonate roofing) or natural, (my favourite) using sun-hardy, root-friendly shrubs and trees such as, maples, crabapples etc. Many of these shade providers can also be grown in containers. However, here are some tougher camellias to consider; Federation, Betty Ridley, Wildfire, Yuletide. Some smaller, more refine cultivars include Nicky Crisp, Night Rider, Mignonne, Paradise Petite, Paradise Liane. Courtyards and patios do lend themselves to an oriental look whereby, the species cultivars such as Lutchuensis, Tsaii and other small-leaved cultivars such as TransTasman, Quintessence, Scentuous, Slim n Trim, Bridal Bouquet are ideal, not to mention the addition of fragrance with some of these cultivars.



*Nicky Crisp*



*Slim N Trim*



*Federation*



*Paradise Petite*



*Scentuous*



*Tsaii*

One important piece of advice concerning the growing of camellias in pots is that they do not like to be 'overpotted'. By overpotting, I mean, buying a baby camellia plant and then dumping it in a larger, ornamental pot. Firstly, I love to think that camellias are going to be ensconced in a non-porous, highly decorative ceramic pot. However, if you throw a small plant into a large one it will become 'lost'. By lost, I mean, it's little root system would be like a little deserted island awash in an ocean of potting medium and most camellias will sulk and not progress much. Camellias actually like to have their quite involved in their growing container however, that doesn't mean root bound. To overcome this problem and to facilitate those lovely pots from the start, I suggest you use the 'pot within the pot' method. This entails planting the camellia still in its plastic pot within the confines of the intended container. Immediately after each flowering season pull the plastic pot out of its hole and remove it from the camellia. After doing this, check the extent of the root system and determine whether it needs potting up to the next size plastic pot and if necessary, do so. Keep doing this seasonally until the camellia plant's root system is getting close to the ornamental pots internal size and then pot it up into the same in its own right.



I won't go into all the ins and outs of cultural advice re growing plants in containers except to say that you can also refer to a more expansive article on the subject I've called '21st Century Pot Culture'. You can also refer to 'Camellias in Containers' written by Dr Ann Marks. Both are on our website.



*The perfect present*