

Aftercare of Camellia Grafts

These comments apply to camellia plant grafts where the entire plant is within a container, usually a black nursery pot. The grafted plant should remain in the original container for approximately a year.

Camellia grafting is usually done in late January or during February when camellias are dormant. A graft is composed of two distinct parts: camellia rootstock or understock and scion or cutting of a desired variety of camellia.

If you come into possession of a newly grafted camellia, the following procedures should be followed:

A large styrofoam cup should be placed over the entire grafted plant. This acts as a miniature greenhouse by keeping the humidity around the graft high as well as protecting the graft from wind and from interference by insects or animals.

Place the grafted plant out of direct sun in a shaded area such as under a tree or on a shaded porch.

Apply the fungicide "Subdue" to the soil once a month to prevent fungal diseases. Follow the instruction label on the fungicide container.

Water sparingly about once a week to keep the rootstock alive. Do not remove the styrofoam cup; water will wick under the cup to keep the soil moist and to provide moisture to the grafted plant.

Begin checking the graft for new growth around the first of May by briefly removing the cup then replacing it immediately. New growth of the scion will begin when the "mother plant" or donor of the scion material begins growth. This may vary by several weeks depending upon the camellia variety. When new growth is discovered, check the plant every other day.

When the scion has three new leaves, make a hole about the diameter of a lead pencil in the cup. When the scion has five new leaves, remove the top half of the cup by cutting it away with a sharp knife or scissors. These two steps are "hardening off" the new graft by changing humidity conditions.

If the leaves wilt, place a new cup over the grafted plant and water lightly. Try removing the cup again in a few days and watch for wilting. If the leaves wilt, replace the cup for a few more days. Repeat this procedure until the leaves remain turgid. At that point, remove the cup completely.

Fertilize the grafted plant with half strength liquid fertilizer as soon as you remove the cup protection. Do not get the fertilizer on the new leaves; it may burn them. Subsequently, fertilize "weakly, weekly" or half strength fertilizer every week.

When the new foliage hardens off or turns dark green as mature camellia foliage, begin lightly fertilizing with granular or pelletized fertilizer about every two months.

Spray with a fungicide (preferably "Pristine" or "Pageant") monthly until the plant goes dormant around November.

Plant the new camellia in the ground while it is dormant in late fall or during the winter. Water thoroughly weekly until the plant gets established, usually about a month.