

Camellia sasanqua - Care Guide & Videos

Caring For Camellia Sasanqua

CARING FOR CAMELLIA sasanqua

(and C. sasanqua crosses)

Nothing brightens up autumn more than the appearance of the first flowers on our Camellia sasanquas at Caerhays and Burncoose. The first flowers appear in late September or early October, with the main flush in early November. The pure original sasanqua species, whether single pink or single white, flower a good month before the named varieties of C. sasanqua which are best in late November or early December. There is a huge collection of 80 to 100 varieties of young Camellia sasanqua at Tregothnan where they are planted as an avenue and most are at their best well before Christmas although some of the C. sasanqua crosses last on well into January.

The Veitch nursery in Exeter (and London) lists Camellia sasanqua as being available by 1892. In 1893 Camellia sasanqua (single pink) won a Royal Horticultural Society First Class Certificate when exhibited by Veitch. The first five Camellia sasanqua arrived at Caerhays in 1900 or 1902 or 1905 from Veitch or Reuthe's nursery. My great-grandfather did not record the names of the camellias which arrived on those dates (and the nursery catalogues were vague) but they were planted along the castle wall and still thrive here today. They may well be the earliest examples of C. sasanqua which still survive in the UK today. It is therefore good news that Burncoose now offers plants taken from cuttings from these original single white and single pink Camellia sasanqua in its catalogue.

C. sasanqua originates from Japan. The Yokohama Nursery was established in London at Kingsway in 1907 and Wada's Hakoneya nursery followed at the end of World War I.

The original *Camellia sasanqua* have tiny leaves and quite small flowers in comparison to most of the camellias which we grow today in our UK gardens. They are, however, clearly and strongly scented on still days in autumn, and perform well when cut and taken indoors. Pollination here takes place with late season wasps which visit the nectar in the flowers on sunny days before succumbing to winter. The original plants do produce small rounded seedpods which ripen in mid-summer rather than late autumn as would be normal for most camellias.

Pure *C. sasanqua* are relatively tender plants which must have shelter from cold east winds and severe frost. Defoliation has occurred here in the extreme winters of 1947 and 1963 but, cut back hard, the plants have reshot and rejuvenated themselves a few times over the decades. A clipping of the new growth once every five to seven years keeps the nice rounded shape of mature plants and encourages the extreme longevity which we have seen at Caerhays.

Named hybrids of *Camellia sasanqua* are much tougher and more resilient than the pure species which is very good news for UK gardeners generally and, in all but the coldest and most exposed parts of the UK, they can readily be grown outside in shelter wherever camellias thrive best in rich, acidic soil with plenty of organic matter in the soil. They do best in partial shade and, particularly, shade from early morning sun when the flowers are out and the first autumn frosts are a risk. *C. sasanqua* cultivars do not need to be grown against a wall for protection but this is not a bad idea on a sheltered north facing wall (as here at Caerhays) in more exposed gardens or in frost pockets.

The named varieties of *C. sasanqua* which Burncoose offers are perfectly hardy in most woodland garden situations. One could argue that they are just as hardy as other camellias providing the planting position meets the criteria set out above.

C. sasanqua 'Narumigata' – these are upright, tall growing, spreading camellias with somewhat pale green leaves. The original 100 year old plant at Caerhays has thrived on a south facing wall and still produces large, cup shaped, single white flowers with pink blotches in bud and fading pink blotches towards the edges of the inside and outside of individual petals. This is a very reliable flowering form which will hold back its buds in cold spells until milder weather follows. The flowers do not turn brown in minor frosts.

C. sasanqua 'Hugh Evans' grows as a huge clump at Caerhays with an overall height of 8-10ft (after 60 to 70 years). In early November it is absolutely plastered in large, single, deep rose-pink flowers.

C. sasanqua 'Rosea Plena' is a double flowered pink which is normally out in late October. It has a fairly dense and compact habit.

C. sasanqua 'Dazzler' is also a large double dark flowered pink which performs best here in November. It has an upright habit and is 6-8ft in height here after 30 years.

From time to time Burncoose has several other named varieties of *C. sasanqua* available in small quantities (eg *Camellia* 'Sparkling Burgundy').

Burncoose also offers varieties of a cross between *Camellia sasanqua* and the hardier *Camellia oleifera*. These are known as the 'Ackerman hardy hybrids' and were originally bred by Dr Bill Ackerman in the US following disastrous losses of *C. sasanqua* varieties in a cold winter there in 1975.

These go under the following names:

'Winter's Charm' – pale lavender pink – anemone form

'Winter's Dream' – medium pink – semi double

'Winter's Interlude' – miniature sized pink anemone-shaped flowers

'Winter's Joy' – bright pink semi double with wavy margin

‘Winter’s Snowman’ – vigorous upright habit and semi-double white flower

‘Winter’s Toughie’ – pink, semi-double

‘Snow Flurry’ – double white

All these plants look wretched and yellow when planted in full sun. They need dappled shade or semi-shade on the edge of woodland. They are however hardier, and more garden worthy, in colder parts of the country than pure *C. sasanqua* varieties.

In addition Burncoose offers a few of the ‘Paradise’ series of *Camellia sasanqua* which were bred in the Paradise nursery in New South Wales, Australia, by a nurseryman called Bob Cherry. He had an interest in hedging camellia plants for the Australian market. These first appeared for sale in the UK at an RHS Vincent Square show in 1994.

These have performed in the garden at Burncoose just as well as the Ackerman hybrids; albeit in full shade along the drive. They arrived at Burncoose in 1994 as well.

‘Paradise Blush’ – deep pink buds opening pure white with pink on the reverse. Semi double.

‘Paradise Glow’ – large growing with deep pink flowers

‘Paradise Hilda’ – rich rose pink, informal double

‘Paradise Pearl’ – pink buds opening to white semi double flowers

If that was not all confusing enough, *Camellia japonica* has been crossed with *Camellia sasanqua* to produce the completely hardy *Camellia x vernalis* varieties of which Burncoose currently offers just two:

Camellia x vernalis ‘Dawn’ – the original plant at Caerhays was planted in 1897 in an exposed south facing position. After pruning every couple of decades the plant is still in rude health today. It has some viral/yellow variegation in some parts of the plant which gives it a pleasant variegated leaf effect. This has caused no harm to the plant. The flowers appear here

from December through to February and are pure white and slightly fragrant on a still day. The flowers have three rows of petals and share characteristics of both parents with the associated hybrid vigour. The plants Burncoose offers are from cuttings from the original plant. Perhaps the very earliest and oldest *C. sasanqua* cross still living in the UK today?

C. x vernalis 'Yuletide' is also a tough camellia which produces its smallish deep red flowers from late November on past Christmas. They open out flat and are very visible. Its foliage is an especially dark green and it has a compact and dense habit (as does 'Dawn').

Images to be added.

C. sasanqua – the pure species – white and pink

C. sasanqua hybrids

C. sasanqua Ackerman crosses

C. sasanqua Paradise crosses

C. sasanqua x *vernalis* crosses

Autumn Flowering Sasanquas - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/-sjrY7sGeHE>

0:00 - Camellia sasanqua white

1:29 - Camellia sasanqua pink

2:05 - Camellia sasanqua larger pink-red plus flies and wasps

3:28 - Camellia sasanqua 'Narumigata'

5:36 - Camellia sasanqua 'Dazzler'

Camellia Sasanqua Part 1 - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/vYxI0uQW9hQ>

Ancient original pink and white sasanqua.

Camellia Sasanqua Hybrids - Part 2- Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/NjLxleKeQRM>

- 0:00 - Camellia sasanqua 'Narumigata'
- 3:01 - Camellia sasanqua 'Sparkling Burgundy'
- 4:13 - Camellia sasanqua 'Dazzler'
- 6:02 - Camellia sasanqua 'Hugh Evans'
- 8:00 - Camellia oleifera (parent of some sasanqua crosses)

Camellia Sasanqua Part 3 - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/p6ytJdhwVSw>

- 0:00 - Camellia sasanqua 'Paradise Blush'
- 1:33 - Camellia sasanqua 'Gay Border'
- 2:41 - Camellia sasanqua 'Sugar Dream'
- 3:55 - Camellia sasanqua 'Setsugekka'
- 4:50 - Camellia 'Cornish Snow' - (cuspidata x saluenensis)

Burncoose Nurseries: Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ

Telephone: +44 (0) 1209 860316 Fax: +44 (0) 1209 860011 Email: info@burncoose.co.uk

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