

Camellia flowers that don't open

Q. I have a couple of older camellia plants that produce plenty of flower buds but they fail to open. These are camellias that are twenty to thirty years old. The plants form flower buds but many of the buds never open. I've seen this happen over the years but I'm not sure why it happens. I've wondered about cold injury but could it be that consistent every year? The plants, otherwise, look healthy. Do you have any ideas or can you suggest a source for help with this problem?

A. If these camellia cultivars are otherwise known to do well in the area, the problem could be:

- Stress - Primarily drought stress could inhibit buds from opening.
- Freeze damage - Most of our camellia japonica cultivars produce flower buds and bloom during the winter. As the flower buds begin to swell, and particularly as they begin to open, the flower buds become more susceptible to freeze injury. Freeze injured flower buds fail to open. Also, those plants located in colder areas of the landscape will be more susceptible to cold injury. Camellia sasanqua cultivars are less likely to experience cold injury to their flower buds because they bloom mostly during fall and early winter when we are less likely to experience freezing temperatures.
- Too many buds on the plant results in the plant not having the reserves for each and every bud to open.

Another situation may have to do with the specific variety. Thirty plus years ago people planted any camellia they could get their hands on because camellias were not as common or available. In the past there was definitely a more limited selection. Even though camellias have been part of our southern landscapes for many years, they are native to parts of Asia. Over the years there have been more and more introductions of cultivars. Some are not well adapted to our colder winters. You'd be wise to select cultivars that are known to do well in our area.

It's interesting that some camellia cultivars simply are not well adapted to the Gulf Coast and thus won't flower well even though they may grow well here. This is why some varieties are favored in Seattle, some do better in California, some do better in England and others perform well here.

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