

SEEDS

Growing camellias from seed is a labour of love requiring much patience as camellia seedlings can take from four to seven years to flower. Seedlings do not generally come true to the parent and are usually single or semi-double flowers.

Seed pods should be collected late March to April when they are splitting open and the seed is ripe. Although it would be better to sow the seeds when they are fresh (when the pod breaks), they could also be stored in sealed plastic bag, together with some **moist** paper towel and placed in the refrigerator crisper, at about 5°C. This should keep most of them viable for up to six weeks.



Each seed is covered with a hard, brown shell and can vary in size. Each seed will also have a distinct 'eye' where it was attached to the outer seed pod. It is around the vicinity of this eye that the root will emerge at germination. The Seeds can be sown individually, into small pots, filled with a commercial seed-raising mixture, to a depth of about 25 mm, or a home made mix of 75% coarse sand and 25% peat moss. Specialised pots such as peat pots or similar can also be advantageous. Some people initially germinate the seed by placing them in a 'zip-type' plastic bag (eg. sandwich or freezer bag) with **damp** sphagnum moss or, peat moss. Ray Garnett, one of Victoria's celebrated camellia breeders likes to soak to his seed in water overnight and then knicks the end of the seed (near the eye) before planting.

Cover the pot with an improvised frame and plastic which could be a simple sealed plastic bag, or even a plastic bottle with the bottom cut off. If placing outside, try a warm position that receives some strong indirect light (preferably morning) and keep moist. Most people have a 'kind' spot in the garden where they can usually place a plant for rejuvenation or propagation. Ray locates his seedling pots on a window sill next to a heat bank to aid germination. Other devices like bottom heat mats and bottom heated, propagation boxes also freely available and are highly recommended for a greater strike rate.

Seeds can take 6—8 weeks to germinate.





Propagation heat mat



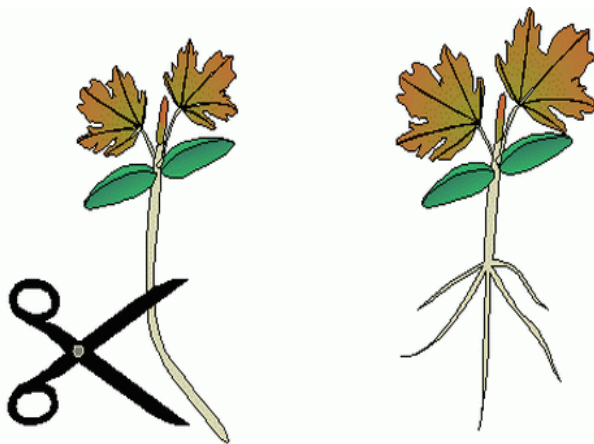
Heated mini propagation house

Don't forget to label the pots from which plants the seeds were originally taken from or, in the case of controlled crosses, what were the seed parents, for future reference. It would be a shame not to know the parentage of a **sensational** new cultivar, should you be lucky enough breed one.

Growing seedlings is worthwhile, even if the resulting flower doesn't make the cut as, the resulting plants can use for grafting stock later.

Repot once the new root (radicle) is 40-50 mm long. The tip of the radicle can be nipped off at this time and hormone powder mixed with fungicide applied. This process usually creates a better root system.

Plant in a small pot (7-10 cm) filled with 2 parts river sand and 1 part peat moss or a commercial propagation mix. Make a hole in the centre of the mixture, place the root in so that the seed kernel rests on the surface of the mix. Place in a well lit, protected area inside or outside. Keep the mixture moist but do not overwater. Only pot up when the roots comfortably fill the pot. Never overpot and use only a free draining, open potting mix.



Cutting of the radicle root



Camellia seedlings in peat pots

Occasional waterings of weak water soluble fertilizers such as Aquasol after a few months of growth will help strengthen the seedling. Reduced amounts of slow release fertilizer can be used after the first year, or before if the plant is growing vigorously.