



Cultural Requirements for Tea

Camellia sinensis- (L.) Kuntze

In the year 2737 BC, tea was discovered, through the infusion of tree leaves falling by accident into the drinking water intended for the Chinese Emperor Shen Nung. This discovery led to the monumental scale of consumption today, nearly 5000 years later, of an estimated 3.5 billion cups of tea consumed each day worldwide. Its various uses, through planting and processing techniques, make a wide array of teas and tea products. All types of tea come from the same bush.



Tea is the second most consumed beverage on the planet—only second to water.

Camellia sinensis is an evergreen Shrub growing to 4 m (13ft) by 2.5 m (8ft) at a slow rate. It is cold hardy to USDA zone 8 with limited success beyond that zone.

Culture: *Camellia sinensis* can be found growing at low altitude (200 ft) and higher altitude (up to approximately 6,000 ft). *Camellia sinensis* prefers light (sandy) and medium (loamy) soils and prefers well-drained soil. It also prefers soils that are acidic (4.5-5.5). It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland). It prefers moist soil but not soggy soil.

Camellia sinensis is not suited well as a house plants because of humidity requirements. Most homes or indoor spaces with climate control dries the air. It is best suited as a woodland floor plant with dappled shade with high humidity. Outdoor greenhouse cultivation is suggested.

Watering: *Camellia sinensis* requires 1" of rainfall a week during growing periods. During periods of dormancy (when night time temperatures are below 50F), water is to be restricted but not allowing the plants to dry out completely. Tea prefers moist but not damp or soggy soils.

Fertilizing: *Camellia sinensis* requires a balanced NPK fertilizer at the beginning and end of the growing season. It is a heavy nitrogen user during growing season because leaves are being harvested. The first three numbers in a fertilizer is Nitrogen. Choose a high nitrogen fertilizer and dose in small amounts regularly during growing season. A premixed liquid fertilizer that is for acidic plants may also be used.

Harvest: Harvest of *Camellia sinensis* can generally begin in year three of planting into the ground. Full maturity occurs at 5 years. Tea must be harshly pruned every six months to establish a "plucking table" that is sturdy enough to support a 125 pound person. This is achieved by pruning at 9", 11", 14", 16", 18", 20", 22". The plucking table starts at 22" and can "creep" slowly during the harvest season. Regular pruning back to the original plucking height are advised as needed. The two tender leaves and a bud are harvested for tea production.