

# CAMELLIA

## LATIN NAME

*Camellia japonica*

## SYNONYMS

Winter Rose

Japanese Camellia

## FAMILY

Tea family (*Theaceae*)

## BOTANY

An evergreen shrub or small tree with solitary red, pink, white or variegated flowers.

## MEDICINAL / EDIBLE PARTS

Leaves, flowers, flower buds, seeds

## WHERE FOUND

Camellia prefers full sun or partial shade. It is native to East Asia – China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, where it can be found in forests and gardens. Cultivated in gardens and greenhouses in cool climates all over the world.

## DOSE

3-4 leaves and/or flower buds per cup of boiling water. Infuse for 10-15 minutes. Drink freely.

The leaves, flowers and flower buds can be used as tea. Dried flowers are cooked as vegetables in Japan, on their own or mixed with rice in a dish called “mochi”. The seeds are rich in an edible monounsaturated oil called “tsubaki oil”

## Phytochemicals

The flowers and flower buds contain saponins, and antioxidants such as anthocyanin, triterpenoids, tannins, (incl ellagitannins), catechins, vanillin, phenolic compounds, kaempferol, and quercetin.

The seeds contain saponins, glycosides, triterpenoids, fatty acids, comprising 76% oleic acid (as in olive oil), 6% linoleic acid, 0.2% linolenic acid, and 18% saturated fatty acids.

The leaf contains methyl ester, quinic acid, ellagic acid, tannins, rutin, hyperoside, quercetin, phenolic compounds, kaempferol and catechin,

## Medicinal use

The natural antioxidants in Camellia may reduce the risk of neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer’s. The strongest effect is from young leaves, followed by flower buds and flowers. Extracts of the leaves have shown strong antiviral effects, including on the HIV virus, and the seed oil is effective against the Epstein-Barr virus. The leaves are antifungal, and the oil is also antimicrobial against lactic acid bacteria, and food borne pathogens (*Salmonella*, *E.coli*, *Staphylococcus* and *Listeria*). The leaves are anti-allergic and useful against sneezing attacks, and has anti-histamine qualities. They have also been found to inhibit calcium loss from bones and help prevent osteoporosis.

The flower buds can help protect and heal the stomach lining in case of inflammation, ulceration and reflux. The flowers are also active against breast cancer cells, and the leaves and flower buds have shown anti-tumour activity, especially in melanoma and leukaemia.

The seed oil may protect against lung metastasis. It is anti-inflammatory, and is also a well-known active ingredient in antiaging cosmetics, reducing water loss and wrinkles, while restoring the elasticity to the skin.

**Side effects:** There are no known side effects.

## Ecology and folklore

The flowers are used in traditional medicine for their astringent, wound healing effect in salves and tonics. They are mixed with sesame oil and used for burns and scalds. Internally the flowers are traditionally used for stomach complaints.

