

**Growing Sasanquas in East Texas**  
**Greg Grant, Tyler Morning Telegraph**  
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As the crisp days of fall approach, one of the most elegant shrubs for East Texas gardens begins its showy display: the sasanqua camellias (*Camellia sasanqua*). With its graceful blooms, mild spicy fragrance, and glossy evergreen foliage, sasanquas bring beauty and versatility to the landscape during a season when many plants are winding down.

Native to Japan, sasanquas are prized for their delicate, single or semi-double flowers that bloom in shades of white, pink, or red. Unlike their larger-flowered cousins, the japonica camellias (*Camellia japonica*), sasanquas are smaller, more refined, and bloom earlier, typically from October through December in East Texas. Their slightly fragrant flowers attract pollinators, adding life to the garden during the cooler months.

Sasanquas are versatile in the landscape. They can be grown as foundation shrubs, hedges, or specimen plants, and many cultivars are well-suited for training into small trees or espaliered forms. Dwarf varieties are perfect for large containers or small garden spaces.

East Texas offers an ideal climate for sasanquas, with its acidic soils and mostly mild winters. However, proper care and placement are key to ensuring their success. Sasanquas thrive in well-drained, slightly acidic soil enriched with organic matter. If your soil tends to hold water, consider planting them in raised beds or amending the soil with compost.

Choose a location with dappled sunlight or morning sun and afternoon shade. While sasanquas are generally tougher than japonicas, excessive heat and direct afternoon sun can stress the plants, leading to leaf scorch or fewer blooms. In shadier spots, they will still grow but may bloom less profusely.

Water consistently during the first few summers to help establish a strong root system. Mature plants are moderately drought-tolerant but will benefit from occasional deep watering during prolonged dry spells. Mulching with pine straw or other coarse organic materials helps retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, and keep the roots cool.

Plant sasanquas in the fall or early spring to allow their roots to establish before summer heat and drought. Dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball but no deeper than the plant was growing in its nursery pot. Backfill with native soil mixed with organic matter, and water thoroughly to eliminate air pockets.

Sasanquas are relatively low-maintenance once established. Pruning is usually minimal, primarily to shape the plant or remove any dead or damaged

wood. The best time to prune is right after they finish blooming in late winter or early spring, as they set their flower buds on old wood.

Fertilize with an acid-loving plant food after the blooms fade. Avoid over-fertilizing, as this can lead to excessive foliage growth at the expense of flowers.

Some reliable sasanqua cultivars for East Texas gardens include ‘Yuletide,’ with its bright red blooms and cheerful yellow centers; ‘Setsugekka,’ a classic white with ruffled petals; and ‘Pink Snow,’ a vigorous grower with soft pink blooms. Dwarf varieties like ‘Shishi Gashira’ are outstanding for smaller spaces and containers.

Sasanquas are a gift to East Texas gardens, providing a splash of color and elegance just as the rest of the landscape is preparing for winter. Their timeless beauty, combined with their adaptability and low maintenance, makes them a must-have for gardeners looking to brighten the fall and early winter months.

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**Image caption:**

***Shishi Gashira sasanqua brightens each autumn in East Texas.***