

FREE GUIDE • CLASSIC GARDENS

Heritage & Classic Gardens on the North Shore

Camellias in winter, azaleas in spring, a clipped hedge along the front fence. How to care for the North Shore's classic gardens, and mix in natives without losing the charm.



Eryldene, Gordon · Photo: Clytemnestra, CC BY-SA 3.0 (Wikimedia Commons)



Japonica camellia · Photo: harum.koh, CC BY-SA (iNaturalist)



Sasanqua camellia · Photo: Lauren McLaurin, CC BY (iNaturalist)

Our garden heritage

Much of the upper North Shore was built in the Federation era (about 1890–1915) and between the wars. Ku-ring-gai Council protects many streets as **heritage conservation areas**, where houses, gardens, hedges and street trees together make the character. Living in one? Garden upkeep is fine, but check with council before big changes like new front fences, removing hedges or major tree work.

The camellia connection

Eryldene in Gordon was the home of Professor E.G. Waterhouse, who bought the land in 1913 (house by architect William Hardy Wilson). He researched camellia history and names, co-founded the Australian and New Zealand Camellia Research Society and started Camellia Grove nursery at St Ives in 1939. Eryldene is on the NSW State Heritage Register and opens on set days.

Camellias: which is which?

	Sasanqua	Japonica
Flowers	Autumn	Winter to early spring
Light	Copes with more sun	Part shade, cooler spots
Flowers	Smaller, often scented	Big and showy
Best for	Hedges, screens, espalier	Feature shrubs
Growth	Fast, hardy	Slower

Did you know?

Sasanqua flowers give nectar to birds, and drop their petals as a pretty carpet.

Sources: Ku-ring-gai Council (heritage conservation areas; native gardening); Eryldene Trust; Heritage NSW State Heritage Register (Eryldene); The Garden Clinic "Charming Camellias"; Camellias Illawarra (pruning; pests & diseases); Yates (azaleas, petal blight, gardenias); Gardening Australia "Colouring Hydrangeas"; Rose Society of NSW care calendar; NSW WeedWise (Murray); Sydney Weeds Network "Garden Escapes" (2021). 'From the field' = my own professional practice. Eryldene is mentioned as local history only.

Camellia care

Basics

- ✓ **Position:** sasanquas take sun; japonicas like morning sun, afternoon shade.
- ✓ **Soil:** acid and humus-rich. Most North Shore soils suit.
- ✓ **Water:** steady moisture with good drainage. How often depends on your soil. From the field
- ✓ **Feed:** camellia fertiliser in early spring and late summer.
- ✓ **Mulch, my rule:** never by the calendar; decided on site. If needed, coarse only, about 50–75 mm, kept clear of the trunk, no fine layers. Camellias have shallow roots. From the field

Pruning: after flowering, never late

Prune **as soon as flowering finishes**, before spring growth. **December is when next year's buds start forming**, so no pruning from then on. Last sasanqua hedge trim by **mid-summer**. Opening up the bush also helps keep scale and mites down.

MYTH: "You can prune a camellia any time."

FACT: Prune late and you cut off next winter's flowers.

Petal blight

A fungus that browns petals soon after they open. Confirmed in Australia in February 2023, including NSW. Pick up fallen flowers and put them in the **red (general waste) bin**, not green waste or compost. Not every brown flower is blight (sun, frost and age do it too). From the field

Tea scale

Yellowish, blotchy leaves? Look underneath for small black or brown spots: tiny sap-sucking insects under a shell. Thin crowded growth; horticultural oil is a common treatment (follow the label).

✓ Do this

- Prune straight after flowering
- Red-bin fallen flowers
- Check leaf undersides
- Water by your soil type

✗ Not that

- Prune from December
- Compost blighted flowers
- Pile fine mulch on the trunk
- Plant japonicas in hot sun

Azaleas

- ✓ Part shade, acid soil (pH about 5.5–6.0).
- ✓ **Prune straight after flowering** (usually late spring).
- ✓ **Azalea petal blight:** mushy brown flowers. Pick off and bin; don't wet the flowers when watering.
- ✓ Yellow leaves often mean the soil isn't acid enough.



Azalea · Photo: Greg III Espera, CC BY (iNaturalist)



Hydrangeas · Photo: Claude Kolwelter, CC BY (iNaturalist)



Rose 'Iceberg' · Photo: APictche, CC BY-SA 4.0 (Wikimedia Commons)



Gardenia · Photo: Takaaki Hattori, CC BY (iNaturalist)

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More classics, hedges & borders

Hydrangeas

- ✓ **Acid soil gives blue, alkaline gives pink.** Whites stay white.
- ✓ Prune in late winter: cut flowered stems back to a pair of fat buds; leave stems that didn't flower. **From the field**

Roses

- ✓ **July** pruning in mild areas; **August** in frosty spots.
- ✓ Clean up prunings and leaves; feed in the second half of August.

Gardenias & magnolias

- ✓ Gardenias: prune after flowering (late summer–early autumn). Yellow leaves usually mean soil not acid enough (pH 5.0–6.5). Failing buds: thrips, dry soil or hunger.
- ✓ Magnolias need little pruning: just after flowering, small cuts only. **From the field**

Mixing classics with natives

Ku-ring-gai Council notes many natives blend well with exotics. Try camellias over native violets or dianella, a coastal rosemary hedge instead of box, or roses edged with native daisies. **From the field**

Seasonal highlights

Autumn (Mar–May)

- Sasanqua camellias flower
- Plant natives (Ku-ring-gai Council calls autumn the ideal time) and new camellias
- Sow cool-season meadow flowers and wallaby grasses
- No trimming sasanqua hedges while they flower

Winter (Jun–Aug)

- Japonica camellias flower
- Pick up fallen camellia flowers (red-bin them)
- Prune roses in July (wait till August in frosty pockets)
- Prune hydrangeas in late winter

Spring (Sep–Nov)

- Azaleas flower: prune straight after
- Prune camellias as flowering finishes, before new growth
- Sow warm-season annuals; spring sowing for kangaroo grass
- Feed roses in late August–September

Summer (Dec–Feb)

- Gardenias flower: prune after
- Last sasanqua hedge trim by mid-summer
- No camellia pruning from December: next year's buds are forming
- Check for tea scale; water by soil type, not by habit

Clipped hedges

- ✓ **Box (buxus):** the classic low formal hedge. Not on NSW weed lists. Clip little and often. **From the field**
- ✓ **Muraya** (orange jessamine): NSW WeedWise says 'Exotica' has become an **environmental weed in parts of NSW**; birds spread the seed. Some hybrids are sterile. Keep existing hedges clipped so they fruit less; for new hedges ask for a sterile type, or plant coastal rosemary.
- ✓ **Sasanqua camellia:** a lovely flowering hedge.

Cottage borders

A happy jumble of spires, mounds and bright front-edge flowers. The Sydney Weeds Network lists **agapanthus, gazania, canna, gaura, seaside daisy, coreopsis, scarlet sage and exotic verbenas** as garden escapes. See my "Choosing a Garden Style" handout for safe swaps.

Quick tip: deadhead near the bush

Snip spent flowers before they seed. The border flowers longer, too.

Precision pruning and regular care, booked ahead

I offer precision pruning of camellias and flowering shrubs, hedge shaping, and regular garden care planned around the seasons, so the right job happens at the right time.

Get in touch for a quote: 0481 106 188

rfhorticulture@outlook.com · or "Get a quote" on my website

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