



Germinating Tea Seeds (*Camellia sinensis*)

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Use freshly harvested seeds. Soak them in water for 24 hours. You may want to use a bag made of cheesecloth to help submerge the seeds. After the soaking, empty the bag into the water and use a strainer to separate the “floaters” from the “sinkers.” Use the sinkers as your primary batch for sowing. The floaters, which may germinate but could become weaker plants, should be labeled as such and separated for follow-up growth observation.

Spread the seeds on a tarp or a plastic nursery flat in full sun and keep them moist with frequent sprays of water. Plant seeds that after a day or two have developed a crack in the seed coat. Sow the seed with its “eye” (the hilum) in a horizontal position (parallel to the surface of the medium). Bury it under 1 inch of medium. Use a medium that has good drainage. Coarse vermiculite has both excellent moisture-holding capacity and good drainage. Keep newly planted seeds under shade (shadecloth rated 80%), and keep the medium moist. Seeds will germinate in about 1–2 months.

After three to four leaves have developed, the roots should be fairly well established. Move plants to 30–40% shade. You may apply a few granules of slow-release fertilizer (e.g., Nutricote 13-13-13 or 18-6-8) and a light dose (half the strength recommended on the label) of a foliar fertilizer formulated for “acid-loving plants.” Soluble formulations for azalea, camellia, gardenia, and rhododendron are suitable and usually have NPK in the ratio 3:1:1 (e.g., 30-10-10, 21-7-7), plus micronutrients. As the seedling develops, gradually move it to full sun in preparation for transplanting when it is about 1 foot tall.

References and further reading

- Feathers, D.L., and M.H. Brown (eds.). 1978. The camellia, its history, culture, genetics, and a look into its future development. American Camellia Soc. R.L. Bryan Co., Columbia, S. Carolina.
- Wilson, K.C., and M.N. Clifford (eds.). 1991. Tea cultivation to consumption. Chapman & Hall, London.
- Zee, F., et al. 2003. Small-scale tea growing and processing in Hawaii. Univ. of Hawai'i, CTAHR publication NPH-9.



Camellia sinensis seeds



Germinated seedling



Potted seedling

Work on tea seed germination was supported in part by the USDA Agricultural Research Service's Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center and the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i.