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News Release

### **How to relocate a Camellia in two steps**

**Question:** I have a ten year old camellia that I need to relocate. When is the best time to move it and how should it be done?

**Answer:** Moving a camellia is possible and fall is a good time to get started with the process that I will recommend. This process can work well with many shrubs but the larger they are the riskier it becomes. I suggest you use a two step process if you have the time available. In the first step, try to make a realistic estimate of how much soil you can leave around the root ball. The more you can leave the greater your chance for success but there is a limit to how much you can physically handle without specialized digging and lifting equipment.

Once this determination is made, use a long pointed shovel to slice through the root system at the distance from the trunk you have determined you can handle. Push the shovel into the soil at least 8 to 12 inches in a solid ring around the plant. Pry the soil apart at least a couple inches but do not attempt to dig the plant out yet. This is much easier to accomplish and better for the plant if the ground is fairly wet which shouldn't be a problem this year.

The reason to create the air gap is to allow root formation at the margin of the hole. When roots are sliced through they will form new branching roots at the point they are severed and those roots will not go across the air gap but will concentrate at the point they were cut. Allow these roots to grow for 8 to 12 weeks before completing the transplant process. Mulch the area above the slit to prevent root damage from cold temperatures and keep the root ball moist particularly at the slit margin. One other thing to do at this time is to *pull as many bloom buds off as possible.* The idea here is to reduce the energy needs of the plant that would normally be used for flower and fruit formation and to redirect the energy towards root formation. *However, do not prune at this time.*

Go ahead and send off a soil test for the new location and make pH and other adjustments prior to moving the plant. Do not add any nitrogen at this time even if the soil test recommends some additional nitrogen. You may find out more about soil testing by visiting [www.aces.edu/soiltest](http://www.aces.edu/soiltest) or by calling your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System office.

When the time comes in January or February to complete the second step, measure the root ball and dig an appropriate sized hole in the new location. Dig the same width but loosen the soil at least a foot or more past the hole's margin. Dig slightly less deep than the depth of the root ball

you intend to keep around the old plant. If the plant is not too large to handle you may leave the top intact but if pruning will be needed, do so prior to digging by making mostly thinning rather than heading cuts.

Use an old sheet or blanket to hold the root ball intact as much as possible and to make lifting easier. Invite some strong family or friends to help with this process because even a small root ball can be quite heavy. Wrap the root ball in the old sheet and tie it in place before attempting to move. Lift the plant by the root ball and not by the trunk.

Make a note and use some marking paint to indicate the orientation of the plant and try to replant with the same directional orientation. Make certain the plant is not set too deeply. It is much better to perch the plant up slightly higher than the soil grade and mound soil up to cover any exposed roots. After planting, water the plant thoroughly to firm the soil around the root ball and make certain you keep it well watered through the first summer and longer if needed.

Covering the entire plant with a shade cloth may be a good idea if the new location has more direct light or direct morning light that hits the lower trunk. Trunk splitting due to rapid thawing after a very cold night can do a lot of damage to cold sensitive plants like camellias. That is one reason to orient the plant in the same general direction as it was previously. If covering the plant is too difficult use a trunk wrap to reflect light away from the plant and to provide some insulation from the cold.

For more tips on growing camellias visit the American Camellia Society at [www.camellias-acs.com](http://www.camellias-acs.com) or contact Regional Extension Agent Tony Glover at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email [gloveta@aces.edu](mailto:gloveta@aces.edu).