**Ligustrum japonicum** ‘Variegatum’: ‘Variegatum’
Japanese Privet

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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**Introduction**

Although often used as a shrub or hedge, Japanese Privet works well when allowed to grow into a small tree, its curved multiple trunks and variegated canopy creating an interesting architectural focus, 8 to 12 feet tall and often considerably wider, for the landscape. Old specimens often grow to 25 feet across. The glossy evergreen leaves are abundantly produced on the upright, spreading branches. The small, white, malodorous flowers appear in terminal panicles during spring in the south and in the summer in northern climes. The blooms are followed by abundant blue-black berries which persist most of the year. The berries are popular with birds and the dispersed seeds occasionally germinate where they fall but this is usually not a nuisance.

**General Information**

Scientific name: *Ligustrum japonicum*
Scientific name pronunciation: lih-GUS-trum juh-PAWN-ih-kum
Common name(s): ‘Variegatum’ Japanese Privet
Family: Oleaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 10A (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America

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Invasive potential: has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment of the Status of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas (Fox et al. 2005). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

Uses: Bonsai; deck or patio; screen; specimen; hedge; container or planter; trained as a standard; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; street without sidewalk; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); highway median

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

Description
Height: 8 to 12 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: vase, round, spreading
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire, undulate
Leaf shape: ovate, oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches, 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: variegated
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Figure 3. Foliage

Flower
Flower color: white/cream/gray
Flower characteristics: showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: oval, round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: blue, black, purple
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: green, gray
Current year twig thickness: medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture
Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: sand; loam; clay; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: high

Other
Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management
Although tolerant of tight clipping, Japanese Privet is quite attractive when allowed to retain its natural multi-stemmed form, making it ideal for use in shrubbery borders and other informal settings. It makes a nice specimen in any landscape where a small dark tree is needed. Planted close together on about 10 to 15-foot centers, ligustrum will form a canopy over a pedestrian walkway but will not grow tall or wide enough for canopy closure over a street or parking lot. The tree looks best in a landscape setting with a low groundcover planted around its base.
Japanese Privet grows in full sun or partial shade and is tolerant of a wide range of soil types, including calcareous clay as long as water is not allowed to stand in the root zone. Plants grow quickly while young but slow with age. Although it can withstand drought, Japanese Privet is not especially salt-tolerant and will require protection from direct salt spray. If you decide to use this plant as a clipped hedge, be sure that the top is kept narrower than the bottom to provide light to the lower branches. This will help ensure the plant will remain full to the ground.

Many other cultivars are available and plants grafted onto L. quihoui for protection against nematodes are preferred, when available. ‘Silver Star’ has deep green leaves mottled with grey and edged in creamy white; ‘Texanum’ is very similar to the species but is lower-growing and has denser growth; ‘Fraseri’ has yellow to yellow-green new growth; ‘Jack Frost’ has glossy green leaves with a thin edge of creamy white; ‘Lake Tresca’ has small leaves and the lower branches droop to form a mound; ‘Lusterleaf’ has large, thick leaves; ‘Suwanee River’ has compact erect branches. Ligustrum x vicaryi has golden variegated leaves, with bright yellow new growth.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

**Pests and Diseases**

None usually serious, although thrips and mites can occasionally discolor foliage. Soil nematodes can cause serious plant decline and they can be prevalent, particularly in sandy soil.

**Literature Cited**