

Pittosporum tobira Japanese Pittosporum, Japanese Cheesewood¹

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen²

Introduction

Glossy, dark green leaves, easy care, and a natural mound-ing shape make pittosporum a popular landscape shrub. However, rapid growth when young makes this a fairly high maintenance shrub, requiring frequent pruning, but growth does slow with age. Clusters of creamy white flowers with a fragrance similar to orange blossoms appear in spring, but they are rarely seen on shrubs because they are frequently pruned off with the regular trimming required to keep the plant in check. It is really better suited as a small tree with lower branches removed to reveal the multi-stemmed trunk, and branches should be left unpruned to allow the flowers to show in the spring. Prune after the flower display. Careful training and pruning can create an ornamental small tree form.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Pittosporum tobira*: Japanese Pittosporum, Japanese cheesewood
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf - *Pittosporum tobira*: Japanese Pittosporum, Japanese cheesewood
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

1. This document is FPS483, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised October 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus; Ryan W. Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture; and Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design; Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.



Figure 3. Flower - *Pittosporum tobira*: Japanese Pittosporum, Japanese cheesewood

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Pittosporum tobira*

Pronunciation: pit-tuss-SPOR-rum toe-BYE-ruh

Common name(s): Japanese pittosporum, Japanese cheesewood

Family: *Pittosporaceae*

Plant type: shrub; tree

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 11 (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to temperate Asia

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

Uses: screen; hedge; border; mass planting; container or aboveground planter; trained as a standard; near a deck or patio

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 8 to 12 feet

Spread: 12 to 18 feet

Plant habit: vase shape

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; pleasant fragrance

Fruit

Fruit shape: irregular

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: gray/silver

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: alkaline; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

Excellent when used as a specimen or informal shrubbery border, pittosporum can be maintained at any desired height by selective hand pruning. The stiff branches with dense foliage can be sheared if this is begun when they are young. Plant on 4 to 5 foot centers for mass planting.

Pittosporum is highly salt-tolerant and grows well on a variety of soils in full sun to partial shade. Growth rate is rapid on well-drained, acid soil of average fertility, although pittosporum can tolerate occasional drought. It does not

tolerate poorly drained or wet soil since root rot quickly infects and kills the root system. This often occurs along foundations where drainage is poor or rain water accumulates from the roof or gutters.

The cultivar 'Wheeleri' has a more compact growth habit and is more suited to residential landscapes. 'Variegata' has creamy white variegated leaves and is quite susceptible to leaf spot diseases.

Propagation of the species is by cuttings or by seed.

Pests and Diseases

Problems include cottony cushion scale and aphids. Micronutrient deficiencies become obvious on soils with a high pH.

Leaf spot and root rot diseases can be problems for pittosporum.

Avoid planting in areas where water accumulates.