

# *Pittosporum tobira* 'Variegata' Variegated Pittosporum<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Glossy, creamy white and green variegated leaves, easy care, and an open, round canopy make pittosporum a popular landscape shrub. However, rapid growth when young makes this a fairly high maintenance shrub, requiring frequent pruning. Growth does slow with age as the plant reaches about 10 feet tall. 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. Flowers also get lost in the green and white foliage. 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.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Pittosporum tobira* 'Variegata'

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

**Common name(s):** variegated pittosporum

**Family:** *Pittosporaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 11 (Figure 3)



Figure 1. Full Form - *Pittosporum tobira* 'Variegata': Variegated Pittosporum

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf - *Pittosporum tobira* 'Variegata': Variegated Pittosporum

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

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**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

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

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting 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:** variegated

**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, growing right up onto the sand dunes along the ocean, and it 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 rainwater accumulates from the roof or gutters. Unfortunately, many pittosporum plants meet their demise in this manner.

## Pests and Diseases

Problems include cottony cushion scale and aphids. Micro-nutrient deficiencies become obvious on soils with a high pH. Leaf spot and root rot diseases can be problems for pittosporum. To prevent root rot diseases, avoid planting in areas where water accumulates.