

Eriobotrya japonica: Loquat¹

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Introduction

The dense, rounded, dark green canopy of loquat is decorated in USDA hardiness zones 8b through 11 in late winter and spring with clusters of apricot yellow, pear-shaped, edible furry fruits. Fruit rarely sets further north. Loquat is a rapidly-growing evergreen tree and can reach 20 to 30 feet in height in the shade but is frequently seen 15 feet tall with a 15- to 25-foot-spread in a sunny location. The 8- to 12-inch-long leaves are rusty-colored beneath and have a coarse texture. Fragrant clusters of creamy white flowers are produced in fall, followed by the delicious, brightly colored, winter fruit.

General Information

Scientific name: *Eriobotrya japonica*

Pronunciation: air-ee-oh-BOT-ree-uh juh-PAWN-ih-kuh

Common name(s): loquat

Family: *Rosaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 8A through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to China and Japan

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (Central, South); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North)

Uses: hedge; trained as a standard; urban tolerant; street without sidewalk; deck or patio; screen; fruit; specimen; espalier; container or planter; highway median



Figure 1. Full Form—*Eriobotrya japonica*: loquat

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 30 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: pectinate, serrate

Leaf shape: oblong, elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen, evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: dark green on top, paler green with a rusty pubescence underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: showy; fragrant; emerges on long terminal panicles that are covered in a rusty pubescence

Flowering: fall

Fruit

Fruit shape: round, oval

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy pome

Fruit color: orange-yellow

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fruiting: late winter to early spring



Figure 3. Leaf—*Eriobotrya japonica*: loquat



Figure 4. Flower—*Eriobotrya japonica*: loquat



Figure 5. Fruit—*Eriobotrya japonica*: loquat

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: gray, brown, somewhat patchy, and exfoliating

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: gray

Current year twig thickness: thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 6. Bark—*Eriobotrya japonica*: loquat

Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: yes

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: sensitive to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Its neat habit and compact growth make loquat an ideal specimen or patio shade tree, and it can be used as a residential street tree or median strip tree in areas where

overhead space is limited. But an adequate clear trunk needs to be developed early in the life of the tree to provide for vehicle clearance. Branches will have to be pruned to grow up, as they tend to droop with time under the weight of the developing branch. It is not suited for planting next to the street if trucks pass close to the tree since adequate clearance is not possible but is successful in wide median strips. It also blends well into informal shrubbery borders and the fruit is attractive to wildlife. It espaliers well against a sunny wall, and makes a good screen due to its dense canopy. Sprouts along the trunk can be a maintenance nuisance.

Providing best fruit and form when grown in full sun, loquat can tolerate partial shade and a variety of well-drained soils. It grows well on soils with a high pH and maintains the characteristic dark green foliage. Clay soil is acceptable as long as there is sufficient slope to allow surface water to run away from the root system. It often looks best in the southern portion of its range when given some shade in the afternoon, especially if it is not irrigated. Loquat should be well-watered until established, but can then survive periodic droughts. Do not overfertilize since this could increase sensitivity to fire blight disease. Loquat may live only 20- to 30-years so it should not be considered a permanent fixture in the landscape. It performs well along the coast with some protection from salty air. It is not for New Orleans area due to wet soils.

Although loquat can easily be grown from seed, many cultivars are available for consistent fruit quality. 'Cham-pagne' (March–May), best for USDA hardiness zone 9, has yellow-skinned, white-fleshed, juicy, tart fruit, one of the better fruits. 'Gold Nugget' (May–June), best near coast, has larger, sweeter fruit with orange skin and flesh. 'MacBeth' (April–May) has exceptionally large fruit with yellow skin and creamy flesh. 'Thales' is a late yellow-fleshed variety. 'Coppertone', a hybrid, has dense growth with copper-colored new foliage and pale pink flowers. 'Variegata' has white variegated leaves.

Propagation is by seed, cuttings, or grafting of cultivars.

Pests

Scales and caterpillars are occasional problems.

Diseases

To reduce fireblight problems, provide good air circulation and keep away from other fireblight hosts, such as *Pyracantha*, pears, etc. If leaves and stems blacken from the top downward, prune back one-foot or more into healthy

wood. Sterilize shears with a mixture of one part bleach to nine parts water between cuts.

Root rot occurs on wet soils. Locate the tree in a well-drained soil.

References

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