

Ligustrum japonicum: Japanese Privet¹

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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 dark green canopy creating an interesting architectural focus, 8 to 12 feet tall and often considerably wider, for the landscape. Old specimens can 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-purple 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*

Pronunciation: lih-GUS-trum juh-PAWN-ih-kum

Common name(s): Japanese privet, wax-leaf privet

Family: *Oleaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 10A (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Japan and eastern Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not considered a problem species at this time, may be (North, Central, South)



Figure 1. Full Form - *Ligustrum japonicum*: Japanese privet
Credits: UF/IFAS

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Uses: 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; Bonsai



Figure 2. Range

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

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire, undulate

Leaf shape: ovate, oblong

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: 1 to 3 inches

Leaf color: dark green and glossy on top, pale green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white/cream/gray

Flower characteristics: showy; emerges in clusters on terminal panicles

Flowering: spring



Figure 3. Leaf - *Ligustrum japonicum*: Japanese privet
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 4. Flower - *Ligustrum japonicum*: Japanese privet
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Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, oblong

Fruit length: 1/4 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy drupe

Fruit color: blue, black, purple

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

Fruiting: fall

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: gray, smooth, and covered with large lenticels

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green, gray

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Bark - *Ligustrum japonicum*: Japanese privet
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; slightly alkaline; acidic; 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 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; and 'Variegatum' has leaves variegated and edged with

white. *Ligustrum x vicaryi* has golden variegated leaves, with bright yellow new growth.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

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.

References

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