



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Pittosporum tobira*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Glossy, dark green leaves, easy care, and a natural mounding shape make *Pittosporum* a popular landscape shrub (Fig. 1). 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 appear in spring, with a fragrance similar to orange blossoms, 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 multistemmed 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*

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

**Common name(s):** Japanese Pittosporum

**Family:** *Pittosporaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub; tree

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**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

**Uses:** screen; hedge; border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; trained as a standard; near a deck or patio

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

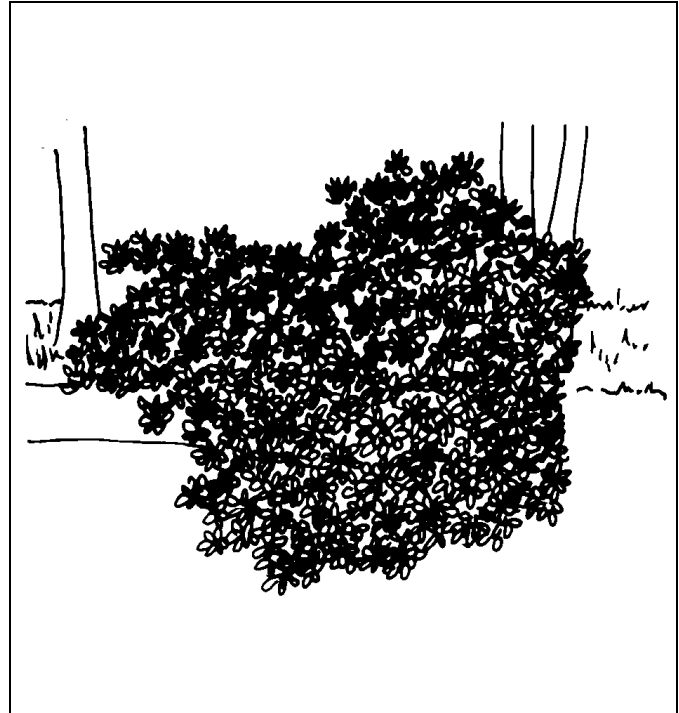


Figure 1. Japanese Pittosporum.

### Description

**Height:** 8 to 12 feet

**Spread:** 12 to 18 feet

**Plant habit:** vase shape

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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 .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

**Invasive potential:** potentially invasive

**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 four to five 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.

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

## Pests and Diseases

Leaf spot and root rot diseases can be problems for Pittosporum. Avoid planting in areas where water accumulates.

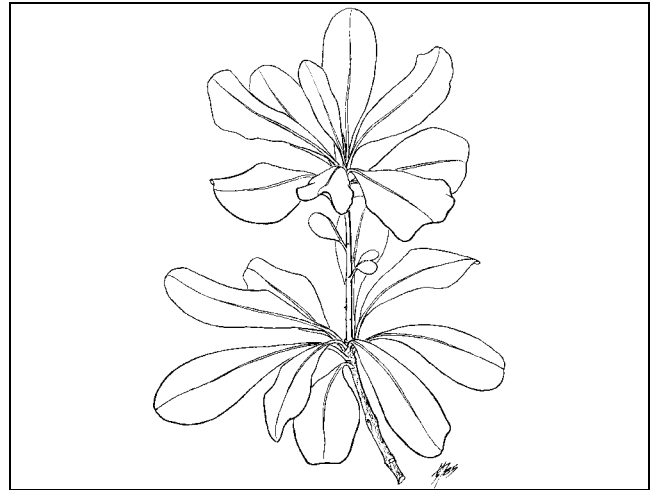


Figure 3. Foliage of Japanese Pittosporum