



## *Ligustrum japonicum* Japanese Privet<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

### 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 (Fig. 1). 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 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 (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** Bonsai; container or above-ground planter; hedge; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree

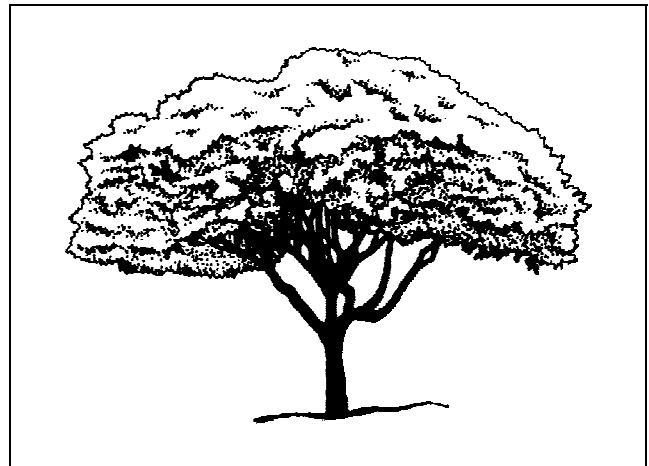


Figure 1. Mature Japanese Privet.

lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

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

### DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 8 to 12 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** round; spreading; vase shape

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

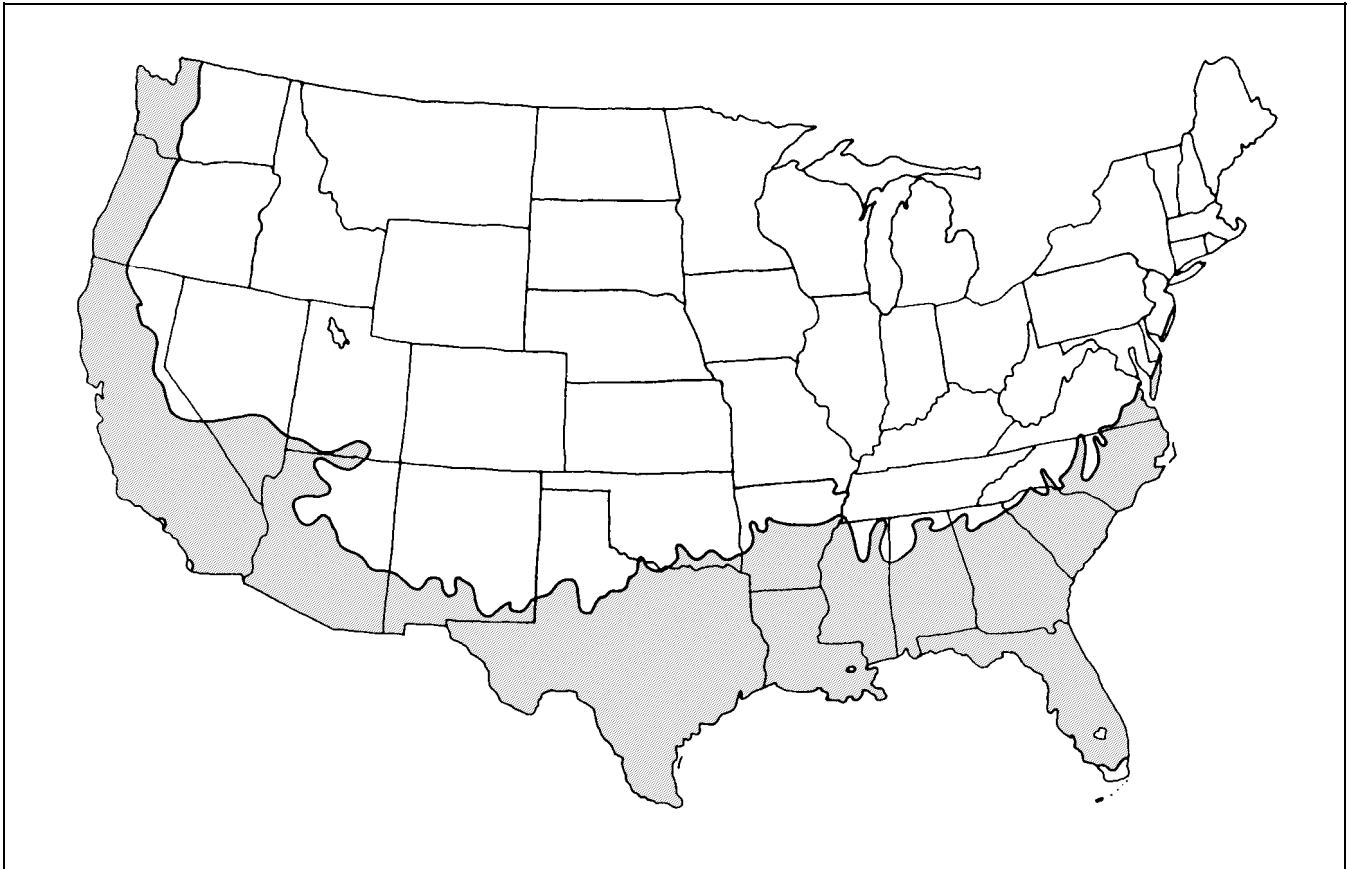


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire; undulate

**Leaf shape:** oblong; ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen;  
evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** showy; spring flowering;  
summer flowering; unpleasant fragrance

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval; round

**Fruit length:** < .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** black; blue; purple

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; inconspicuous  
and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent  
on the tree

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily  
damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree  
grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or  
pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely  
grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple  
trunks; showy trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop  
strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green; gray

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun;  
tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

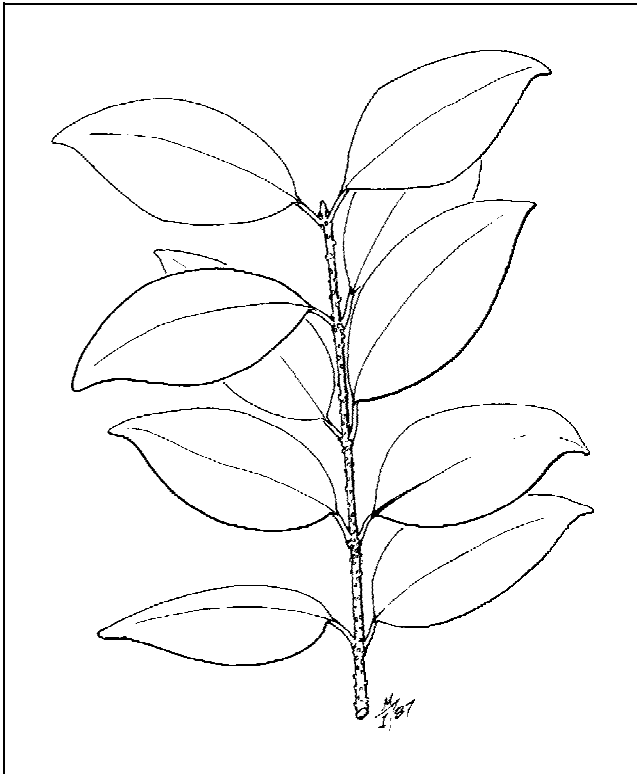


Figure 3. Foliage of Japanese Privet.

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

### 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.