**Ligustrum**

*Ligustrum vulgare*

**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 blueblack 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  
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 lawns (3-4 feet wide);  
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

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite  
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

**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 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 lowergrowing 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.

*by Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson*