**Mahonia fortunei**

Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

This upright, multi-stemmed evergreen shrub makes an attractive mass planting or north-side foundation planting in the shade where its soft, narrow, pinnate leaves lend a tropical effect (Fig. 1). New leaves emerge with iridescent burgundy tips. Use it in groups of three or more, or as a single specimen in small gardens. It can be placed in front of other shrubs which thin out at the bottom because mahonia stays full to the ground. Tallest canes fall over and grow horizontally as they reach about three or four feet tall. This creates a shrub about six feet wide with a rounded form. Plant on three to four foot centers in a mass planting.

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**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Mahonia fortunei
- **Pronunciation:** mah-HOE-nee-uh for-TOON-nee-eye
- **Common name(s):** Fortune’s Mahonia
- **Family:** Berberidaceae
- **Plant type:** shrub
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 9 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round
**Planting month for zone 8:** year round
**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America
**Uses:** border; mass planting; specimen; accent
**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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**Description**

- **Height:** 3 to 5 feet
- **Spread:** 3 to 5 feet
- **Plant habit:** upright; round
- **Plant density:** moderate
- **Growth rate:** slow
- **Texture:** medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: odd-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: spiny
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; fall flowering; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy
Fruit color: black

Fruit characteristic: rarely fruits

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: unknown
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches
Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest
**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**

Eventually reaching four feet but still retaining the lower, dark green foliage, Fortune’s Mahonia almost appears to have been clipped into its natural hedge form. Small, showy yellow flowers appear in spring, summer, or fall and are followed by inconspicuous blue-black berries which are popular with birds. The plant combines nicely with Holly Fern and other ferns planted several feet in front of Fortune’s Mahonia, perhaps due to the fern-like, fine-textured foliage.

It is generally pest-free, and Fortune’s Mahonia can endure the hottest locations and fairly low soil moisture conditions but does need protection from the direct rays of the sun. A partially shaded or full shade setting is perfect. It prefers a well-drained, slightly acid soil.

Propagation is from cuttings or seeds.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

Several leaf spots may be seen, but infected leaves can be picked off and destroyed.