**Gordonia lasianthus** ‘Variegata’  
‘Variegata’ Loblolly-Bay

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**INTRODUCTION**

A native American, usually single-trunked, evergreen tree, this cultivar of Loblolly-Bay reaches a height of 35 to 60 feet with a columnar or pyramidal, very open growth habit (Fig. 1). The two to seven-inch-long, glossy, dark green variegated leaves are a light grey color on the underside, giving a two-toned effect in the wind. Although evergreen, several individual leaves at a time will turn a brilliant scarlet color in the fall adding to its attractiveness. The white, two to three-inch-wide, five-petalled, cup-shaped flowers open from late spring through summer and are very attractive but sparsely produced throughout the canopy.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Gordonia lasianthus* ‘Variegata’
- **Pronunciation:** gor-DOE-nee-uh lay-zee-ANTH-us
- **Common name(s):** ‘Variegata’ Loblolly-Bay, ‘Variegata’ Sweet-Bay
- **Family:** Theaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 9 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** native to North America
- **Uses:** espalier; reclamation plant; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
- **Availability:** grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

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**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 35 to 60 feet
- **Spread:** 10 to 15 feet

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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.
Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
Crown shape: columnar
Crown density: open
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrulate
Leaf shape: oblong; oblanceolate
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate; reticulate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: variegated
Fall color: red
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower
Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

Fruit
Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: brown; green
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure
Breakage: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: medium
Preferring partial shade and moist soil, Loblolly-Bay can tolerate full sun with sufficient moisture. Loblolly-Bay has a shallow root system and will die if not watered during periods of drought. It is found in the wild most often growing in wet sites in the shade of maples, cypress and pines. It is well-suited for planting in boggy and other poorly drained soils. Loblolly-Bay is not salt-tolerant. Not for dry climates.

Propagation is by cuttings.

**Pests**

Pest problems are borers in weakened trees, aphids, and caterpillars.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

Loblolly-Bay makes an attractive specimen planting and its light, airy growth habit lends itself well to smaller, partially enclosed locations. In moist soils, Loblolly-Bay naturalizes well and is well-suited to the low-maintenance landscape. Due to the shape of the crown, it makes a suitable tree in urban areas with restricted, narrow overhead space, and should do well as a street tree, although it has not been extensively used yet.