**Ligustrum japonicum** ‘Variegatum’
‘Variegatum’ Japanese Privet

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**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 variegated canopy creating an interesting architectural focus, 8 to 12 feet tall and often considerably wider, for the landscape (Fig. 1). Old specimens often 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* ‘Variegatum’

Pronunciation: lih-GUS-trum juh-PAWN-ih-kum

Common name(s): ‘Variegatum’ Japanese 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 lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

**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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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: variegated
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

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

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristics: showy; spring flowering; summer flowering; unpleasant fragrance

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

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round
Fruit length: < .5 inch
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: black; blue; purple

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
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 other 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. *Ligustrum x vicaryi* has golden variegated leaves, with bright yellow new growth.

Propagation is by cuttings or grafting.

**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.