**Torreya nucifera**  
Japanese Torreya¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

Japanese Torreya is a very slow-growing evergreen which will eventually reach 40 feet tall in the home landscape and is capable of reaching 75 feet in the wild (Fig. 1). With a pyramidal silhouette and long, graceful branches clothed with glossy, dark green leaves, Japanese Torreya provides medium to deep shade beneath its canopy. The stiff, 1.25-inch leaves give off a pungent aroma when crushed. The 1.5-inch-long, green, edible fruits follow the insignificant flowers and persist on the tree, requiring two years before maturity when they ripen and split apart. The seeds are very oily.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Scientific name: *Torreya nucifera*  
Pronunciation: TOR-ee-uh noo-SIFF-er-uh  
Common name(s): Japanese Torreya, Japanese-Nutmeg  
Family: Taxaceae  
USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 8 (Fig. 2)  
Origin: not native to North America  
Uses: hedge; screen; specimen; no proven urban tolerance  
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

**DESCRIPTION**

Height: 15 to 30 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: pyramidal  
Crown density: moderate  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: fine

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

*Leaf arrangement:* alternate (Fig. 3)
*Leaf type:* simple
*Leaf margin:* entire
*Leaf shape:* linear
*Leaf venation:* none, or difficult to see
*Leaf type and persistence:* evergreen; fragrant; needle leaf evergreen
*Leaf blade length:* less than 2 inches
*Leaf color:* green
*Fall color:* no fall color change
*Fall characteristic:* not showy

**Flower**

*Flower characteristics:* inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

**Fruit**

*Fruit shape:* round
*Fruit length:* 1 to 3 inches; .5 to 1 inch
*Fruit covering:* fleshy
*Fruit color:* green

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

**Trunk and Branches**

*Trunk/bark/branches:* droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; showy trunk; 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:* green

*Current year twig thickness:* thin

**Culture**

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

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

*Drought tolerance:* moderate
Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Japanese Torreya should be grown in shaded areas on rich, moist soil. In the colder regions of its range it should be grown where it can be protected from harsh winter winds. It is not widely available but could be produced and planted as specimens in home and commercial landscapes.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.