



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Aucuba japonica*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

This tough, very slow-growing evergreen shrub tolerates a wide range of soils, performs well in deep shade, and has attractive glossy green leaves and bright-red fruit (Fig. 1). The variegated forms brighten any area in the landscape with deep shade. Leaf variegation differs dramatically from plant to plant; some have leaves with only a few flecks of yellow, whereas others seem to have yellow leaves with a few flecks of green. Leaves on plants receiving sun in the summer or winter will become chlorotic.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Aucuba japonica*

**Pronunciation:** aw-KEW-buh juh-PAW-nick-uh

**Common name(s):** Aucuba, Japanese Acuba, Japanese Laurel

**Family:** *Cornaceae*

**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:** mass planting; container or above-ground planter; foundation; cut foliage/twigs; accent

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

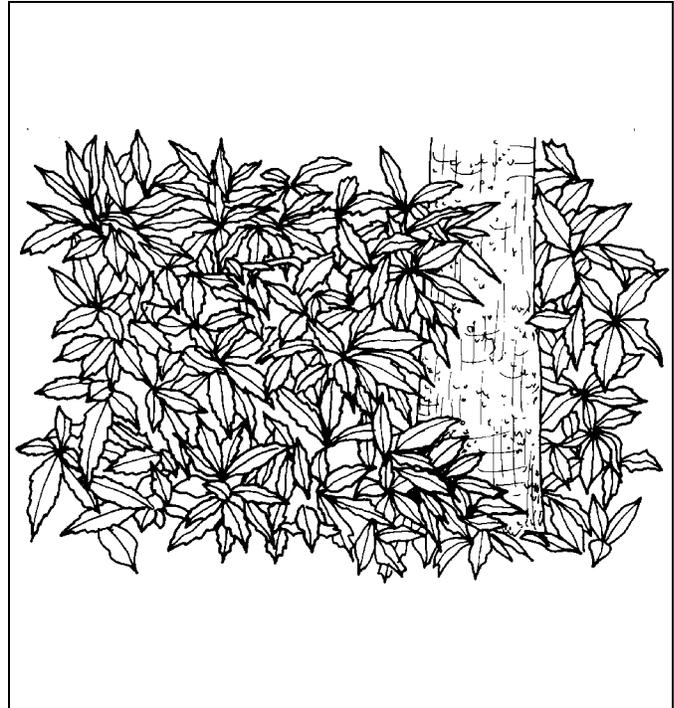


Figure 1. Aucuba.

**Spread:** 3 to 4 feet

**Plant habit:** round; oval; upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

### Description

**Height:** 3 to 8 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches  
**Leaf color:** variegated  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** green  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** oval  
**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch  
**Fruit cover:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** red  
**Fruit characteristic:** persists on the plant

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy  
**Current year stem/twig color:** green  
**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:** poor  
**Plant spacing:** 24 to 36 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Aucubas prefer a rich, sandy loam with some organic matter but they will adapt successfully to a heavier soil as long as drainage is good. They are best when used in mass, planted close together because they grow so slowly. Plant two to three feet apart for the best landscape effect. Pruning is seldom necessary because of the slow growth rate. The irregular, multistemmed habit of growth makes Aucuba a natural for informal plantings, while the dense, compact form makes it useful as a free-standing specimen in small areas. Only female plants bear red berries in fall and winter, provided there is a male plant close by. Aucuba makes a nice house plant, and it performs well in a container in the shade.

Cultivars include 'Crotonifolia' with white-spotted leaves; 'Goldieana' with mostly yellow leaves; 'Nana' with a compact, dwarf form; and 'Variegata' with yellow-spotted leaves.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Soil nematodes and scales can be a problem, with the resultant sooty mold blackening the leaves.

### Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

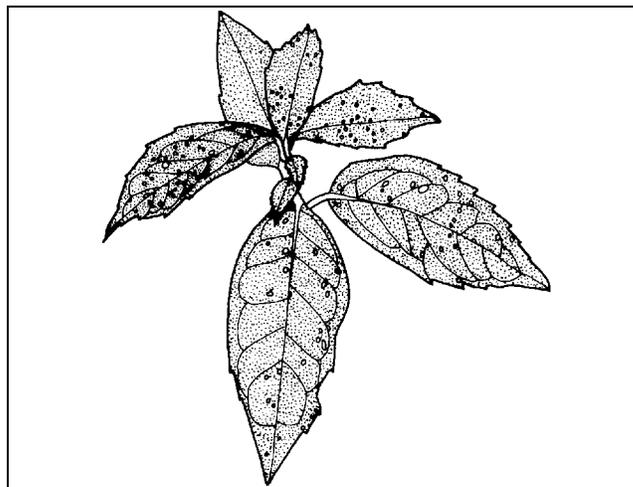


Figure 3. Foliage of Aucuba