Aucuba

Japanese aucuba (Aucuba japonica) is a handsome broadleaf evergreen shrub used extensively in South Carolina under the canopy of large trees or as a foundation plant in shady corners of the home. It is adapted to all areas of South Carolina.

Mature Height/Spread

Aucuba usually grows 6 to 10 feet tall and 4 to 5 feet wide. It can grow up to 15 feet tall. A dense, upright to rounded shrub, it usually remains neat and tidy.

Growth Rate

It grows at a slow to moderate rate, but given good doses of water and fertilizer, it grows more rapidly.

Ornamental Features

Aucuba has dark green, leathery leaves. They remain dark and lustrous throughout the seasons, provided they are located in shade. There are several variegated forms, including the gold speckled Gold Dust (the ‘Variegata’ cultivar).

Flowers are not showy. However, the dark, shiny, red fruit that matures in October and November is quite handsome, although partially hidden by the large leaves. The fruit is an ellipsoid, one-seeded, ½-inch long, berry-like drupe. Females do not produce fruit unless a male aucuba is in the vicinity.

Landscape Use

Aucuba is generally grown as a foliage plant. It is an ideal shrub for a dark corner on the north or east side of a house. Use it as a specimen, in screens or groupings, provided it is planted in shade. The variegated types brighten a dark corner or break the monotony of a large sea of green.

The plants are dioecious (that is, aucuba shrubs are either male or female). So, to ensure good fruit production, plant mostly females with an occasional male nearby.
The ideal soil is moist, high in organic matter and well-drained, although it will tolerate almost any soil condition. Aucuba should be planted in partial to full shade (summer and winter), as its leaves will "burn" in summer and turn sickly green in winter. It competes successfully with the demanding roots of other shrubs and trees, and transplants easily. Avoid overhead watering to reduce incidence of disease. Prune occasionally to restrain growth or eliminate dead or dying branches caused by disease.

**Problems**

The biggest problem with aucuba is foliage burn when exposed to full sun, and this can be avoided with proper plant placement. This is especially true of varieties with variegated foliage.

Diseases are rare. However, Phylllosticta leaf spot and Phomopsis stem dieback can occur. Aucuba is susceptible to rot rots if planted in poorly drained sites. Fungal anthracnose caused by *Colletotrichum* sp. may damage foliage and stems. Insects are not a significant problem.

**Varieties**

- 'Variegata' – This is a yellow-flecked form and is female. It is the true Gold Dust Plant.
- 'Crassifolia' – This is a male form with large, dark green leaves.
- 'Picturata' – This is a female form with showy, dark green leaves with bright golden yellow centers. Produces fruit with a male pollinator nearby.
- ‘Nana’ – This is a dwarf form that matures at 3 to 5 feet tall and 3 to 5 feet wide. It is a female form that produces red fruit, and has dark green foliage.
- 'Serratifolia' – This is a green leaf female form that produces heavy fruit with a male pollinator nearby.

Many other cultivars may be found with varying amounts of yellow spotting or larger yellow sections on the leaves. For example, see the numerous cultivars available at Plant Delights Nursery at www.plantdelights.com.


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