Ligustrum

Common or European privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and Chinese privet (*L. sinense*) have escaped into the wild in South Carolina to become a weedy and invasive pests. Birds eat the small, black fruit and deposit the seeds everywhere. Many other *Ligustrum* species, however, are more well-mannered landscape plants, but still may spread by seed dispersal. Privets are most often grown as hedge plants because they are so easy to grow. All have abundant, showy clusters of very sweet smelling, white flowers in late spring. Clipped hedges bear fewer flowers, since shearing removes most of the flower-bearing branches.

**Japanese Privet (Ligustrum japonicum)**

**Mature Height/Spread:** This is an evergreen shrub with a compact growth habit to 10 feet high and 5 to 6 feet wide. The foliage is 2 to 4 inches long and rather leathery. The oval leaves are glossy green above and almost white beneath. The white flowers appear in May and have a very strong odor, which may be offensive to some people. The blue-black berries mature in September to October and often persist through the winter. They are about ¼ inch in diameter. Birds do not seem to be interested in these berries.

**Growth Rate:** Japanese privet has a rapid growth rate of 25 inches or more per year.

**Landscape Use:** This shrub is excellent for use as a hedge or screen or for shaping into a small tree.

**Cultivation:** Japanese privet is adapted to adverse conditions of drought, heat, cold, many soil types and salt spray. It is easily transplanted and prefers partial shade to full sun. The only soils this shrub does not grow in well are those that are permanently wet.

**Problems:** Despite the plant's susceptibility to a variety of insects, such as white flies and scale, and to diseases, such as anthracnose, none are serious problems, and they rarely require spraying.

**Cultivars & Varieties:**
- 'Rotundifolium' or roundleaf Japanese privet grows to 5 feet and has nearly round leaves to 2½ inches long.
- 'Howard' has leaves that are yellow when new and green when mature. Both colors are present at the same time.
- 'Recurvifolium' is a slightly smaller-leaved form with wavy leaf margins. The leaves are twisted at the tip.
- 'Silver Star' grows to 8 feet and has leaves that have gray-green mottling and silver edges.
- 'Variegatum' has leaves with white margins and blotches.
Glossy Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*)

**Mature Height/Spread:** This evergreen tree will reach 35 to 40 feet, but can be kept lower as a big shrub. The spread is about 5 to 10 feet. The leaves are 4 to 6 inches long, glossy dark green on both sides and less spongy than the leaves of Japanese privet. Glossy privet has large clusters of white flowers, followed by many purple-blue berries.

**Growth Rate:** The growth rate is very rapid.

**Landscape Use:** Glossy privet makes a fine lawn tree and is excellent as a tall screen or windbreak. There are some disadvantages to planting this tree. The fruit crop is immense and berries will drop on and stain paved areas and cars. Fallen berries sprout in groundcover and will need pulling. Many people dislike the flower smell and fruiting clusters are bare and unattractive after fruit drop.

**Cultivars & Varieties:**
- 'Compactum' has dense, dark green, waxy leaves.
- 'Davidson Hardy' is an exceptionally hardy plant with excellent foliage.
- 'Tricolor' has leaves that are variegated with white, and they are pink when young.
- 'Macrophyllum' has very large leaves.

California Privet (*Ligustrum ovalifolium*)

**Mature Height/Spread:** This semi-evergreen shrub grows rapidly to 15 feet, has dark green, 2½-inch leaves and dull white, heavy scented flowers.

**Landscape Use:** California privet makes a good hedge, when plants are set 9 to 12 inches apart. The hedge requires frequent shearing, especially in hot, wet weather. Seedlings come up everywhere and established plants are hard to get rid of.

**Cultivars & Varieties:**
- 'Argenteum' has leaves that are bordered with creamy-white.
- 'Aureum' has leaves with a green spot in the center and bordered with golden yellow. This variety is also sold as 'Variegatum' or golden privet. Variegated Chinese Privet (*Ligustrum sinense 'Variegata*) tends to revert back to solid green foliage and then produces fruit that are eaten and dispensed by birds or water.

Vicary Golden Privet (*Ligustrum vicaryi*)

**Mature Height/Spread:** This deciduous shrub grows to 6 feet, sometimes to 12 feet. The leaves are golden yellow. This color is strongest on plants in full sun and does not develop well under hedge shearing.

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