Photinias are large shrubs that were once used for tall hedging here in the south. The most common photinia is the appropriately named "red tip", which is easily recognized each spring as it sends out its first flush of bright red new leaves. As with many popular plant species, it has been widely planted and over used. With the rampant spread of a fungal leaf spot, many red tip hedges have died or are dying out.

**Red Tip Photinia (Photinia x fraseri)**

**Leaves:** Evergreen leaves are oval in shape and 2 1/2 to 4 inches long. New growth is bright red. The color lasts two to four weeks before maturing to green.

**Flowers/Fruit:** Small white clusters of flowers with an unpleasant smell appear in mid-spring and are followed by red, berrylike fruits.

**Size & Growth Rate:** A red tip grows 10 to 15 feet tall and 5 to 8 feet wide, although it can get larger with age. It is a moderate to fast growing plant.

**Culture:** While it is an extremely tough and vigorous plant that will grow in almost any soil, (except extremely wet ones), red tip photinia prefers a rich, well-drained soil. It prefers full sun to partial shade. Good air circulation is a must.

**Landscape Use:** Red tips were commonly used to create tall hedges and were often planted too close together to allow for adequate air circulation, which made them more susceptible to leaf spot. Red tip photinia is highly susceptible to Entomosporium leaf spot, and as such its use for hedging is not recommended.

**Diseases:** Entomosporium leaf spot, which is caused by the fungus *Entomosporium maculatum*, is a severe problem on red tips. Early symptoms consist of small, circular, red spots on both the upper and lower surfaces of new leaves. On heavily diseased leaves, the spots unite to form larger, maroon blotches. Mature leaves develop dark brown or gray spots surrounded by reddish purple rings. Eventually, the leaves will fall off. Repeated leaf drop over several years along with other problems often results in plant death.

The fungus is most active during fall and spring months when weather is cool and rainy. Fungal spores are spread over short distances, so healthy plants can often remain healthy as long as they are in an isolated situation (far from other red tips).

**Cultural Control:**
- Prune red tips in the winter when they are dormant. Pruning during the growing season will encourage new growth, which is highly
susceptible to attack by the fungus. Mature leaves are more resistant to leaf spot.

- Rake up and discard fallen leaves, and remove infected plant material. Apply fresh mulch around plants to cover any leaves that were missed. These practices reduce the amount of fungus present in the spring, resulting in less infection.
- Provide excellent air circulation. This often means thinning out a few plants in a hedge.
- Avoid wetting the leaves when watering. Splashing water spreads the fungus.
- Avoid summer fertilization that will promote new growth late in the season.

**Chemical Control:** Apply a recommended fungicide at the first sign of disease or when new growth starts, and repeat application every 7 to 14 days. Be sure to follow the directions on the label. However, the use of fungicides for management of Entomosporium leaf spot is most effective when initiated early at new leaf emergence, and continued regularly until leaves become mature in early June. Then, applications should be made when conditions favor disease development (immediately following rainy periods). Fungicides do not be applied during hot, dry periods.

Fungicides labeled for Entomosporium leaf spot control contain one of the three active ingredients:

**Chlorothalonil:**
- GardenTech Daconil Fungicide
- Tiger Brand Daconil
- Bonide Fung-onil Concentrate
- Hi-Yield Vegetable, Flower, Fruit, & Ornamental Fungicide
- Ortho Max Garden Disease Control
- Ferti-lome Broad Spectrum Landscape & Garden Fungicide
- Southern Ag Liquid Ornamental & Vegetable Fungicide

**Propiconazole:**
- Banner Maxx Fungicide
- Bonide Infuse Fungicide
- Ferti-Lome Liquid Systemic Fungicide II
- Monterey Fungi-Fighter Fungicide
- Martin’s Systemic Fungicide RTS

**Myclobutanil:**
- Spectracide Immunox Multi-Purpose Fungicide

This disease is very difficult to control once plants are severely infected. If you do not want to spray your plants every one to two weeks, it may be best to replace them with another plant species (see Red Tip Substitutes below).

**Japanese Photinia (Photinia glabra)**

**Leaves:** Evergreen leaves are long and oval in shape and 1½ to 3½ inches long. New growth is bronzy-red.

**Flowers/Fruit:** Small white clusters of flowers with an unpleasant smell appear in mid to late spring and are followed by red, berrylike fruits that later turn black. Flowers are smaller and appear later than those of red tip photinia.

**Size & Growth Rate:** Japanese photinia grows 10 to 12 feet tall and wide and is a moderate to fast growing plant.

**Culture:** See Red Tip Photinia.

**Landscape Use:** See Red Tip Photinia.

**Diseases:** Japanese photinia is highly susceptible to Entomosporium leaf spot, and as such its use for hedging is not recommended.

**Chinese Photinia (Photinia serrulata)**

**Leaves:** Evergreen leaves are oblong in shape with serrated edges and grow 4 to 8 inches long. New growth is light green to bronze colored.

**Flowers/Fruit:** White clusters of flowers 4 to 7 inches across have an unpleasant smell and last about two weeks. Flowers appear in early spring, before those of either red tip or Japanese photinias and are followed by bright red, berrylike fruits.

**Size & Growth Rate:** Chinese photinia is larger than red tip or Japanese photinia, growing 20 to 30 feet tall and 15 to 20 feet wide. It may grow even larger with age. Chinese photinia is a moderate to fast growing plant.
**Culture:** See Red Tip Photinia.

**Landscape Use:** Chinese photinias are easily trained into small trees if lower limbs are removed.

**Diseases:** Chinese photinia shows resistance to Entomosporium leaf spot, but may be affected by fire blight and powdery mildew if grown in a shady location.

**Selecting Screening Plants**

With a severe fungal infection, red tip photinias may warrant replacing. When looking at plants as red-tip replacements, choose plants for a particular site based upon both cultural conditions and aesthetic considerations. Remember that it is best to have diversity in the landscape. The use of several different well-adapted species, whose cultural requirements match the site conditions, results in healthier plants.

Some factors to consider when choosing alternative screening plants include:
- Site conditions: soil moisture and type, drainage, sun exposure, and wind exposure.
- Near the coast: salt spray and saline soil.
- Height requirements, both desirable and limits from structures such as power lines.
- Width available for growth.
- Year round screening necessity.
- Density of screening desired.

**Red Tip Substitutes**

Camellias (Camellia spp.) are seldom thought of as screening plants. Although they are relatively slow-growing shrubs, they mature to dense evergreens and are very useful for screens in partial or dappled shade. Their height is variable depending on the cultivar, but many grow 6 to 15 feet tall or more. For more information, please see [HGIC 1062, Camellia](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).

Chinese fringe-flower (Loropetalum chinense) is a fast growing evergreen that quickly reaches 6 to 10 feet tall. White-flowered cultivars can eventually reach up to 15 feet tall. Purpleleaf Chinese fringe-flower (Loropetalum chinense var. rubrum) varieties are often smaller, but 'Zhuzhou Fuchsia' grows 8 to 10 feet tall with hot pink flowers in spring. The burgundy leaves help make it a good color substitute for red tips. Both types grow well in sun or part shade and are adaptable to pruning. For more information, please see [HGIC 1085, Loropetalum](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).

Most tea olives make excellent, dense evergreen screens or hedges in sun or medium shade. Holly tea olive (Osmanthus heterophyllus) grows 8 to 10 feet tall or more, and is more narrow than the other species mentioned here. Fortune's tea olive (O. x fortunei) matures at 15 to 20 feet tall. Fragrant tea olive (O. fragrans) can reach as much as 20 to 30 feet tall near the coast, but will be smaller in the upstate. All of the tea olives have exceptionally fragrant, small, white flowers in fall. Fragrant tea olive also has yellow and orange-flowered cultivars. For more information, please see [HGIC 1083, Tea Olive](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).

Carolina cherry laurel (Prunus caroliniana) is a fast-growing, upright evergreen that can reach 20 to 30 feet tall when grown as a tree. 'Bright 'N Tight' (sometimes sold as "Compacta") is more compact, with smaller leaves and tighter growth. It grows to a more manageable 10 to 20 feet tall, is best in sun or part shade, and tolerates heavy pruning. For more information, please see [HGIC 1069, Laurel](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).

Japanese ternstroemia (Ternstroemia gymnanthera) is sometimes called "cleyera". It is an excellent substitute for red tip since it resembles it with red new growth in spring and has similar leaf texture. It grows slowly to 8 to 10 feet tall and 5 to 6 feet wide in shade or part shade.

Many viburnums (Viburnum spp.) make excellent evergreen screens. There are numerous species and varieties with a wide range of sizes. Viburnums are available for virtually any situation, and they will add to the landscape with flowers and berries. For more information, please see [HGIC 1075, Viburnum](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).

Wax myrtle (Myrica cerifera) is excellent for difficult sites with its tolerance of sand, wind, salt, and poor soil. This broadleaf evergreen shrub or tree grows quickly to 15 to 20 feet high and wide, and is tolerant of pruning. It requires full sun. For more information, please see [HGIC 1076, Wax Myrtle](https://www.ars.usda.gov/sep/n.hp/HGIC.html).
Plum yew (Podocarpus macrophyllus), Florida anise (Illicium floridanum), taller varieties of yaupon holly (Ilex vomitoria) and many other plants can be considered when looking for appropriate red tip photinia alternatives.

**Mixed Screens**

It is important not to search for only one plant species as a substitute for photinia. The widespread planting of a single plant species could possibly lead to a repeat of the problems that have affected red tips, American elm, and other plants.

Planting a mixed screen, where multiple species of plants are grouped together in small clusters is the best solution. Groups of three or five plants of a single species can be planted in a single row where space is limited or in an alternate layered (staggered, two-row) planting where more space is available.

Mixed species screens help to prevent the spread of pest problems from one plant to the next. The advantage to planting several rows of staggered plants is better air circulation around the plants. This reduces the humidity level around plants thereby reducing the incidence of disease problems while still achieving a full screen.

In a mixed screen, even if one species develops problems that are so severe it has to be removed and replaced, the entire planting does not have to be sacrificed. Mixed screens can also be far more interesting and rewarding throughout the seasons, offering the chance to turn a basic screen planting into a beautiful part of the landscape.

Pesticides updated by Joey Williamson, HGIC Horticulture Agent, Clemson University. 10/15. Prepared by Rebecca Slater, HGIC Horticulture Specialist, Karen Russ, HGIC Horticulture Specialist, and James H. Blake, HGIC Director/Adjunct Professor, Clemson University. New 03/07

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