

Pittosporum tobira – Mock Orange

Common Name(s): Japanese pittosporum, Mock Orange, Pittosporum

Cultivar(s): Variegata, Mojo, Cream de Mint

Categories: Shrub

Habit: Evergreen

Height/Width: 8 to 12 feet tall and 4 to 8 feet wide; some dwarf varieties available

Hardiness: Zones 7 to 10

Foliage: Alternate, simple, leathery, lustrous dark green leaves; 1.5 to 4 inches long

Flower: 2 to 3 inch clusters of fragrant flowers in late spring

Flower Color: creamy white

Site/Sun: Sun to shade; Well-drained soil

Form: Stiff branches; dense broad spreading mound

Regions: Native to Japan and China; grows well in the Coastal Plains and Eastern Piedmont of North Carolina.

Comments: Tough and durable plant that tolerates drought, heat, and salt spray. It can be severely pruned. However, heavy pruning may cause blooming to be reduced. The plant is frequently damaged by deer.



Variegated pittosporum. Photo Karen Russ



Pittosporum tobira growth habit. Photo Scott Zona

Currituck Master Gardeners Plant of the Month – December 2017

When, Where, and How to Plant

Pittosporums are very tolerant of a range of soil conditions, as long as the soil is well drained. Poor drainage or excessive moisture can lead to rapid death from root rot diseases. So, avoid planting in areas where water accumulates after rains. They grow well in both full sun and shade, and are very heat tolerant. Pittosporums can suffer from cold damage if they are grown in the upper Piedmont or Mountain regions of North Carolina.

Growing Tips and Propagation

This shrub is relatively low maintenance and can be pruned at any time during the year. Propagation is by semi-hardwood cuttings taken from mid-July to September and treated with a root-promoting compound. Cuttings root best in a well-drained potting medium.

Care and Things to Watch

Pittosporums are very drought tolerant once established, although they are most attractive and healthy when provided with regular and adequate amounts of water, especially while becoming established. Insect problems include cottony cushion scale, mealy bugs, and aphids. Horticultural oil sprays are effective against these. Several leaf spot diseases can be a problem, so in general, ensure good air circulation, avoid overhead watering, and clean up fallen leaves to minimize these.

Please note: Chlorothalonil fungicides can cause leaf drop and even death of the pittosporum, especially on variegated cultivars. Chlorothalonil (Daconil) is not labeled for use on pittosporum. Always read pesticide labels before use, and use only according to the directions on the label.

Companion Planting and Design

Pittosporums are well suited for hedges and screens due to their density and toughness. They also make very attractive small, multi-stemmed trees when lower branches are removed. Dwarf cultivars are compact and attractive in foundation plantings, as high ground covers or mass plantings, and in containers.

Bloom Period and Season Color

Clusters of creamy white flowers with a fragrance similar to orange blossoms appear in spring, but are rarely seen on shrubs because they are frequently pruned off. The small flowers can also get lost among the green and white foliage. Flowers are best displayed in the small tree form with branches left unpruned. If pruning is needed or desired it is best to prune after flowering.

Sources: *Clemson University:* HGIC 1082; *NC State:* plants.ces.ncsu.edu;
University of Florida: #FPS484