

## Pieris japonica – Year-Round Interest

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Japanese Pieris, pronounced pi-ER-is, is a broad-leaved evergreen shrub named from the Greek *Pierides*, a name for the Muses. It also goes by the common name Andromeda. The plant is native to eastern China, Taiwan and Japan.

Japanese Pieris grows well in a sheltered spot with light shade in zones 5–9. If you have a location where azaleas and camelias do well, then pieris will do the same. Planted under trees, in dappled shade, makes a pieris very happy.

Be sure to provide moist, rich soil containing organic matter. Good drainage is essential. Pieris love acidic soil, so they are well-suited to our area. Deer avoid them, I suppose, because they are poisonous to people and animals. (Smart deer!) They require little to no pruning.

On the downside, lacebugs are a serious pest for Japanese pieris. *Pieris floribunda* is a North American variety that is resistant, but it tends to like mountain areas with low humidity. There are some *floribunda/japonica* hybrids that are resistant to lacebugs; look for them as well.

Japanese pieris provide interest in every season. The leaves are glossy dark green all year round. Some cultivars such as 'Variegata' have leaves with a cream color around the edges. In the spring, all pieris japonica sport new leaf growth in shades of pink and red. Dainty drooping flowers appear in March that look similar to Lily-of-the-Valley flowers. Depending on the variety, these flowers can be pink or white. In the fall and winter, red seed-pods make the plant look jolly against the green foliage.

Pieris is slow growing. Plant them in small groups for best effect but be sure to leave some space between them for air circulation. The plants average 4–5 feet tall and 4–5 feet wide; however, they may get six feet tall in a good location! (If you want a smaller plant, use a compact variety such as 'Cavatine,' 'Prelude' or 'Purity').

There are many other cultivars of pieris. Some with pink flowers, such as 'Dorothy Wycoff,' 'Valley Rose' and 'Valley Valentine' are lovely; 'Snowdrift' is a white-blooming variety, as are 'Forest Flame' and 'Mountain Fire.' The last two have vivid orangish-red new growth.

Pieris japonica is a beautiful plant to try in your shade garden.



photo: University of Richmond



*Flaming Silver'*

## References

- Japanese Pieris, *Pieris japonica*, VCE Publication 3010-1492, November 3, 2010
- Pieris Care and Planting – How to Grow Japanese Andromeda Bushes, Gardening Know-How, Jackie Carroll
- *Pieris japonica*, University of Connecticut College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Plant Database
- Plants for Problem Places, Linda Yang, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1997



*'Prelude'*