

PRIVET (*Ligustrum*)

Background

This is a small tree which makes very beautiful bonsai of all possible styles without much fuss. It is a strong tree and popular from beginners to advanced users. It consists of over 50 subspecies and cultivars with diverse colours and forms native to Europe, North Africa, Asia and Australasia.

Location

It is often planted as hedging, due to its tolerance of little water and tolerance of any soil type. It is used as hedging on the islands of roads. Due to its ability to survive in harsh conditions and its ability to self-propagate and outcompete other species, it is often declared as invasive. The most commonly used species in bonsai is the small leaved privet (*Ligustrum ovalifolium*). The common privet (*ligustrum vulgare*) is also a good candidate, but due to the large size of the leaves, they need constant pinching to get proportions correct. Their ability to reduce their leaf size is remarkable. Variegated species often lose their variegation and return to their natural green. The Wax Leaf Privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*) is also used in bonsai but is much slower.



Characteristics

It is evergreen, but the leaves can look damaged and brown during winter. Its fast-growing flexible branches allow for easy shaping and tolerate severe trimming. It forms a dense crown very quickly. It is attacked by the Christmas beetle, leaving half eaten leaves or leaves with holes, with brown ridging.

The small, white flowers are gathered in terminal branches and are clumped and heavily scented. Fruits are round, starting off with green clumps and then maturing to black berries. The berries are mildly poisonous to humans.

Feeding and repotting

It responds well on a repot, every one to two years. Its forms a compact fibrous root system, and left to become pot bound, often loses a branch.

Should a stump die, new shoots are often formed from the base.

Suckers form at the base where growth can be rapid, resulting in thick branches



in the wrong place. These suckers should be removed.

Privets also like well-drained soil with constant moisture. They thrive in both sunny and shaded positions. Feed the whole year round while it has leaves.

Wiring

Wiring in winter often results with dead branches. The branches are very brittle and break off very easily, especially at their collar. During the growing season, the branches form very quickly with wire and may result in wire damage.

However, wire damage heals quickly, if they are not too deep.

Propagation

Propagation by seed, layering, division of root suckers, or cutting taken in autumn. The leaves are often distributed by birds.

Bonsai

It is often recommended as one of the indoor trees, but experience tells me otherwise. It is not a formal tree. Trees removed from hedging often have multiple trunks, lending themselves to raft and clump styles. Tree can live to well beyond 100 years.