

PIERIS, LEUCOTHOE, AND DAPHNE BROADLEAF EVERGREENS FOR SHADED LOCATIONS

By DOUGLAS CHAPMAN



Pieris floribunda is a dense, bushy evergreen with white flowers on upright panicles. It is tolerant of shade and high pH.

The group known as broad-leaf evergreens is dominated by rhododendrons. But if one is considering diversity, ease of maintenance, and shade tolerance, then pieris, leucothoe, and daphne should highlight your shade plant list.

There are two pieris readily available—Japanese Pieris (*Pieris japonica*) and Mountain Pieris (*P. floribunda*). *P. japonica* is an upright, broad-leaf evergreen shrub, somewhat compact in habit, with spreading branches, reaching 6 to 8 feet in height and 5 to 6 feet in spread in central Michigan and 9 to 12 feet in height with a 6- to 8-foot spread in central Ohio.

This slow-growing ericaceous plant has lustrous dark green foliage during the summer months

(formed in rosettes), that becomes somewhat dull in winter. When considering leaf color, the most exciting is rich bronze which the new growth displays during mid-April. The perfect, slightly urn-shaped white flowers are effective during mid-April. They are borne on 3- to 6-inch long pendulous panicles. During a cool spring, they can be effective in the landscape for two to three weeks. The flower buds are formed during mid-summer, taking on this pendulous habit which is extremely effective in the landscape for late summer and winter months.

The most significant problems as far as insects include mites and lace bugs—two sucking insects which can easily be controlled if they

build up beyond an economic threshold. Diseases such as Phytophthora or leaf spots can become problems, but with the new pesticides, they are controllable.

This specimen broad-leaf evergreen is extremely effective in border plantings or as single specimen plants, grown in the shade with deep-rooted trees or other ericaceous plants.

Being ericaceous, it has a rather shallow-fibrous root system, rarely extending more than 18 inches into the soil. Therefore, *P. japonica* should be planted in moist, yet

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Leucothoe transplants easily but is sensitive to late winter desiccation. It is a colorful understory plant.

well-drained acid soils high in organic matter.

It is extremely effective when planted in partial or full shade locations. Pruning is rarely required, making this plant relatively maintenance free.

Mountain Pieris (*P. floribunda*) is an exciting evergreen shrub, bushy in habit, low and rounded, rarely getting over 3 to 6 feet in height and width. It is extremely dense.

The white flowers, which are quite fragrant, are borne on 2 to 4-inch panicles that are held quite upright. One should expect to see this shrub flowering during mid to late April. It can be extremely effective for two to three week periods during cool, moist springs.

Like the Japanese Pieris, it grows well in high organic, acid, well-drained soils but is extremely tolerant of higher pH's. It is outstanding as a specimen or mass-planting.

This ericaceous shrub grows well in companion with deep-rooted plants, such as pine, spruce,

or oak. Of the two pieris, Mountain Pieris is least available, yet for American gardens, it is probably best suited. It requires little maintenance, being a rather upright shrub, rarely succumbing to insect and disease problems. Further, it grows well in a range of pH from 4 to 6.5.

Drooping Leucothoe (*Leucothoe fontanesiana*) is perfect for almost any naturalized or woody landscape. It is probably best grown in a container or planted with companion trees, such as pine or oak.

Leucothoe is a low-spreading with somewhat arching habit, graceful plant, reaching 3 to 5 feet in height and 4 to 6 feet in width. The new growth is bright lime-green, becoming a rich dark green during summer which changes to a light bronze color during the winter months. The flowers, in central Michigan, are not seen until late May and are white, perfect, fragrant, and borne in long axillary racemes under the foliage, ac-

centing the arching-pendulous habit of this shrub.

Leucothoe transplants easily, thriving in well-drained, high organic acid soils. It is particularly sensitive to desiccation by wind or bright sunlight during late winter. Therefore, it must be grown in woody settings. Drooping Leucothoe is outstanding as a park plant or in naturalized areas in individual home landscapes.

There are two daphnes which are readily available while being almost opposites. Rose Daphne (*Daphne cneorum*), a small, ground coverlike plant, and February Daphne (*D. mezereum*), a shrub.

Rose Daphne is a small, low-spreading evergreen shrub, reaching only 6 to 10 inches in height and 2 feet in width. It is most effective in the home landscape, be it in a rock garden or as a woody, almost wild flower plant.

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D. cneorum is shade-labile, that is, it must be grown in shady locations. It does extremely well as a companion where rhododendrons are effective. The small leaves are almost needle-like. Being a lustrous green throughout the summer they become an almost dull grey-green through the winter months. The bright pink fragrant flowers often appear during late April or early May.

Some have observed flowering a second time during late summer. These flowers are similar to *Iberis sempervirens*—rather tight clusters, being pink in color.

Rose Daphne is best grown in a container. It transplants successfully when planted in early spring. It should be grown in well-drained high organic soil with a pH somewhere between 6 and 7. If the area is exposed to southwest sun or wind, Rose Daphne soon declines.

The key is planting in medium shade, giving a north to northeast exposure and well-drained soil.

This plant is best when used as a detailed or intimate plant in home landscapes while rarely having a place in the commercial or golf course setting.

February Daphne (*D. mezereum*) is a deciduous shrub with erect branches, reaching 3 to 5 feet in height and width. It is most effective when grown in partial to full shade. In central Michigan, one can expect the lilac or magenta fragrant flowers to appear during early to mid-April. The fruit, which is about 1/3 to 1/2 inch in diameter, is brilliant red and matures in June.

Of the *D. mezereum* cultivars, the most outstanding is *D. mezereum* 'Alba' which has pale yellow to white flowers and exciting yellow fruit. This yellow fruit can be outstanding during summer and fall. The leaves are rosettes near the terminal.

February Daphne does well in high organic, loamy, well-drained soils. It is perfectly hardy to 20 degrees below zero. This shrub has been grown or cultivated in the

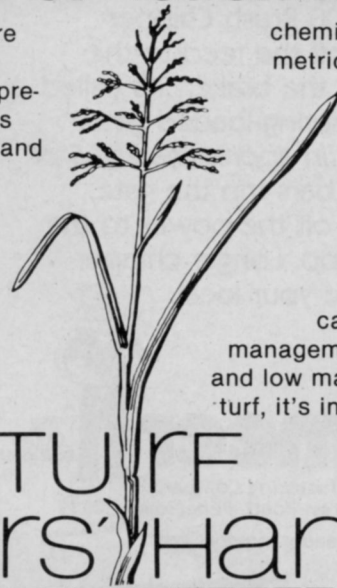
U.S. since colonial days and naturalizes well. One should consider it not only an outstanding specimen or mass planting shrub in the individual home landscape but also one that integrates well into commercial or large-area landscapes as a companion plant for deep-rooted medium-large trees, be they deciduous or evergreen. It is a plant that does extremely well when planted with a north to northeast exposure.

Pieris, leucothoe, and daphne are outstanding broad-leaf evergreens. Certainly leucothoe, with its somewhat pendulous, shrubby habit; *P. floribunda*, which holds its flowers in a very formal, upright manner; and February Daphne are outstanding in woody plantings. Rose Daphne is almost insect- and disease-free, yet a plant that wants to be grown in areas where it receives little or no foot traffic. Foot traffic or heavy use areas soon lead to plants declining. If one has that intimate woody location, these three genera are a must to consider.

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