

Aucuba japonica - Growing Guide

Aucuba Japonica

Spotted laurel

Aucubas may not be the most floriferous or 'standout' plants, but they most definitely have great use in many gardens. Firstly they will grow well in full or partial shade in dark corners. Secondly, they make a most effective and dense windbreak of 8-10ft in height. As a windbreak Aucuba will tolerate extremes of wind and salt laden gales without turning a hair. They are thus a most useful plant in keeping under-drafts out of the garden often as a low growing support to other taller growing windbreak trees such as Ilex oak or Pinus insignis. Thirdly, many of the varieties of *A. japonica* have spotted, speckled or variegated leaves which can and do provide an attractive backdrop to a border or a shady corner of the garden.

With the removal of *Rhododendron ponticum* as our principal low growing windbreak in the shelterbelts around the woodland garden here, as a result of its infection with *Phytophthora ramorum* a decade or more ago, Aucuba have made an ideal alternative.

Aucuba can be lightly trimmed if need be to create a more defined hedge. Doing this too frequently or too severely will reduce the amount of spring flowering. However, if your plant is elderly, the flowers are small and appear in mid spring. They appear reddish-purple and male flowers have yellow anthers in erect panicles. Female forms of Aucuba have similar flowers but go on to produce attractive crops of bright red berries in the autumn and, birds permitting, on into spring.

A. japonica 'Crotonifolia' is a female form with delightful golden yellow speckles on its green background leaves.

A. japonica 'Golden Spangles' is also a female form with striking golden variegation.

A. japonica 'Rozannie' is a more compact growing hermaphrodite/bisexual variety with dark green leaves and deep purple flowers. This is a prime choice if you want a good crop of berries.

Aucuba omeiensis is a distinct erect growing species which grows here to around 10-12ft. The leathery leaves are up to a foot long and 4-5in wide in maturity. This species was introduced from China by Roy Lancaster in 1980. It is an attractive, vigorous, and hardy species which may yet develop into a small multi stemmed tree.

All Aucuba are easily propagated from semi ripe new growth cuttings in early autumn. Most varieties of Aucuba produce root suckers in, around, and under the main plant and these can readily be dug up and moved. Seed are easy to grow but, if you have more than one variety of Aucuba, the individual seedlings will have variable leaf forms and variegations.

[A. omeiensis features in the diary with flowers and berries. I have taken today more pictures of Aucuba as a hedge. Recent pictures of Aucuba berries in diary too.]

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