

Leucothoe - Growing Guide

Growing *Leucothoe Fontanesiana*

Commonly known as 'Switch Ivy'

This evergreen shrub originates from mountainous regions of the south east USA. It has been grown in the UK since 1793 and, in one form or another, is a common sight in gardens as well as in municipal and supermarket plantings.

Its use in public places is because this is a really tough and resilient plant which quickly grows into a dense mat and can therefore be very effective as ground cover, especially the more dwarf growing *L. fontanesiana* 'Scarletta'.

Growing it as a dense mat or groundcover has one disadvantage. The flowers are borne on long arching branches laden for 12-18in of their length with racemes of white flowers. These appear in May. Since the flowers hang from the lower side of the branches they are hard to see unless the plant is perhaps grown on a bank. At RHS Rosemoor Garden the new growths are propped up with metal supports to make them more visible to visitors.

Quite apart from the merits of *L. fontanesiana* as a groundcover plant probably the greatest attribute of forms of this plant is as multi coloured evergreen shrubs with different leaf colours at different times of the year.

L. fontanesiana 'Rainbow' has leaves irregularly variegated white in spring turning crimson with pink variegation as the new growth appears and more purple as the cold weather draws on. It is at its best in a cold winter.



Leucothoe 'Rainbow'



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Leucothoe 'Rainbow'



Leucothoe 'Scarletta'



Leucothoe 'Scarletta'



Leucothoe 'Scarletta'



Leucothoe axillaris



Leucothoe 'Curly Red'



Leucothoe 'Rainbow'



Leucothoe 'Rainbow'

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