

Growing *Pieris* to Landscape Size

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There are many nice selections of *Pieris* and except for *P. floribunda* they are easy to propagate and grow. Most of our emphasis is on *P. 'Brouwer's Beauty'* which is a cross between *P. floribunda* and *P. japonica*. It is bushier and lower growing than *P. japonica* and seems to have inherited resistance to lacewing fly from *P. floribunda*. We have adopted a no-spray policy in the nursery for the last 3 years and it seems to be working. The flower buds of 'Brouwer's Beauty' have a nice maroon winter color which is very effective in the landscape.

Our greenhouse propagation year starts about 1 August. The rooting operation begins after washing down the greenhouse with a Clorox solution. Vegetative cuttings 3 inches to 4 inches long are best, although flowering shoots can be used by removing the flower buds. Cuttings from young plants and shaded plants are better than from older plants growing in full sun. Cuttings are stripped of leaves except for the top 4 or 5, lightly wounded on both sides, dipped in Hormodin No. 3 or, Dip 'n Grow, or Woods solution diluted 1 : 7 (v/v). We then stick in 4-inch deep flats or greenhouse benches in a mixture of peat and pine bark (1 : 1, v/v) with the fine bark particles graded out. By the middle of October they are well rooted. We then cut them out of the flats, transplant them about 4 inches apart, and place them in a cool greenhouse maintained at a 55F night temperature during the winter. The planting mixture in the cool house is peat and ungraded pine bark (1 : 1, v/v). Approximately every other time we water during the winter we soak the benches with a half-rate Peters starter fertilizer solution. We let the benches become quite dry between watering, this eliminates our need to use fungicides. Watering is done in the morning on sunny days so we can turn the fans on and dry off the foliage quickly. We think this does slow down the growth somewhat, even so by spring the plants come out of the benches with a good firm 4 inch × 4 inch rootball.

The liner beds are plowed as deep as possible the previous fall and left open. Around 1 May when the ground has dried out we add 2 inches of peat to our lighter soils and 3 inches of ungraded pine bark to our heavier soils. At this time a light dressing of urea is also rototilled into the beds. The spring transplants have 1 or 2 flushes of growth and are planted at a 10 inch × 10 inch spacing and shaded with snow fence. Before bringing to the liner beds the plants are soaked in a starter solution in the greenhouse.

Pieris floribunda is a more connoisseur-type plant and certainly not the money maker of *P. japonica* selections. Due to the fact that *P. floribunda* is difficult to root from cuttings, we collect our seed from a native stand in West Virginia. The seed is sown in flats of peat and pine bark medium (1 : 1, v/v) topped with a 1/8-inch layer of sphagnum moss and placed under intermittent mist. During the winter the seedlings are transplanted to 4 inch deep flats so they can be moved to the shade house for the summer. They are set out in liner beds the 2nd spring after germination. *Pieris floribunda* is more difficult to establish in the landscape. It prefers overhead shade with a well drained high organic soil. A north slope is also best.

Prior to transplanting the bed-grown liners to the field, the ground in late April is sown with Sudan grass which is mowed and fertilized during the summer. Around the end of July the Sudan grass is plowed under. After growing 2 years in the liner beds, we start field planting around mid-August and on into October. The green manure Sudan grass is rototilled in as we plant each row. We do no spring transplanting of liners because we are busier and the ground is usually too wet. In addition, the watering needs are more critical during the summer.

The liners are dug out of the beds and soaked in tubs of starter fertilizer prior to planting. High phosphorus fertilizer enhances the root growth of both transplants and seedlings. The soaking meets the watering needs of the new transplants in the field for 2 weeks or more. Even in this present dry fall, we have not had to do any additional watering. In the middle of September, oats are sewn over the top of the transplants to provide winter protection and keep the ground from washing away. The oats are killed by hard frost.

After 2 years in the field the *Pieris* should be excellent, full, 18-inch to 24-inch plants with a good root system, which will thrive in the landscape.