

A Review of *Pieris* Cultivars and their Propagation at New Place Nurseries[©]

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This paper describes the propagation of *Pieris* cultivars at New Place Nurseries using semi-ripe cuttings. It includes our experiences with cultivars no longer in production on the nursery. Some species and cultivars which are not produced at New Place Nurseries, will be described, as they are important to an overall understanding of this genus. However, some of these are not readily available to the trade, because of the lack of market demand or because of production difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Pieris is a genus of highly ornamental evergreen shrubs, grown for their flushes of juvenile foliage or for their attractive flowers which appear from March onwards. To retain the fresh spring growth, the plants need to be situated in a sheltered position, protected from frost.

PIERIS CULTIVARS GROWN AT NEW PLACE

Red Foliage Forms.

***Pieris* 'Flaming Silver'**. Variegated form of 'Forest Flame' (below). Foliage with white margins, dark green centres. Flowers borne in small clusters. Flushes red to pink then limey-green before adult foliage.

***Pieris* 'Forest Flame'**. Large compact form once established. Flowers are white appear as arching clusters. Foliage flame-red fading to pink and yellow.

***Pieris japonica* 'Little Heath'**. Compact slow-growing cultivar. Flowers insignificant but white. Foliage similar to 'Flaming Silver' but smaller, flushing red to dark salmon-pink changing through to green.

***Pieris japonica* 'Mountain Fire'**. Medium-growing cultivar with white flowers. Foliage is a vivid red changing through to a chestnut-brown later.

***Pieris japonica* 'Tilford'**. Dark green, slightly rigid foliage. Flowers borne in upright sparse clusters and coloured white. A compact and slow grower. New flush of foliage is bright red, appearing in late spring, generally after frost risk. This poses some difficulties regarding sales as *Pieris* tend to be early season interest rather than mid season.

Flowering Forms.

***Pieris japonica* 'Dorothy Wickoff'**. Foliage dark, complementing flowers which are pale pink in bud, opening to white and borne in clusters.

***Pieris* 'Flamingo'**. Foliage dark and glossy. Flowers appear in large clusters, crimson fading to a lighter pink.

***Pieris japonica* 'Pink Delight'**. Somewhat similar to 'Blush' in appearance, but has clusters of drooping panicles of flowers, pale pink with white at the base.

***Pieris japonica* 'Purity'**. Compact grower and relatively later flowering than the other taxa. White flowers borne in large clusters.

***Pieris taiwanensis* Group**. Compact to medium growing shrub. Foliage bronzed in appearance fading to olive-green. Flowers are white and borne in spreading clusters.

***Pieris japonica* 'Valley Valentine'**. Compact and slow growing. Flowers dark red with a white base, borne in drooping clusters.

Other Species and Cultivars of Importance for Foliage.

***Pieris japonica* 'Firecrest'**. Vigorous grower with large white flowers borne in clusters. Foliage is fire-red, turning yellow and maturing to green.

Pieris formosa. Large, dark, glossy, evergreen, toothed foliage. Juvenile flushes are copper in appearance. Unfortunately not readily available.

***Pieris formosa* var. *forestii* and cultivars**. Popular species but not readily available. New foliage flushes red. Flowers large and slightly fragrant.

***Pieris formosa* var. *forrestii* 'Wakehurst'**. Old cultivar once popular with gardeners. Strong and vigorous with broad foliage. Juvenile foliage is a vivid red. Unfortunately not readily available or popular with nurseries, as there are difficulties in the production of the finished plant. It does not grow well in containers as it is prone to leaf scorch.

Other Species and Cultivars of Importance for Flowers.

***Pieris japonica* 'Blush'**. Medium-size shrub with dark glossy foliage. Flowers pink in bud, opening to white tinged with pink, gradually fading to white.

***Pieris japonica* 'Cupido'**. Compact cultivar, broad and upright. Flowers creamy white.

***Pieris japonica* 'Debutante'**. Dwarf cultivar ideal for containers and small gardens. Mature plants form a compact mound. Flowers white, borne in dense upright panicles.

***Pieris japonica* 'Sarabande'**. Dwarf, compact form, but grows taller than 'Debutante'. Flowers borne in erect racemes. Ideal for smaller gardens.

PROPAGATION AND PRODUCTION METHODS USED AT NEW PLACE NURSERIES

At New Place, *Pieris* taxa are propagated by semi-ripe cuttings, taken from the growth flushes of stock plants. We have found that, to maximise the cuttings harvest, it is essential that these stock plants are given adequate protection from frost. Plants are grown in beds or containers in glasshouses.

Timing and Method. We find that the optimum time for taking *Pieris* cuttings is from June to October, when the material has firmed up. This gives us maximum rooting potential. Cuttings taken after October, will yield a lower percentage rooting and will be more variable in their rooting response. Cuttings taken in June will establish well but will require deflowering before potting on.

We use cuttings some 5 cm long, cut under a node or dormant bud and wounded on the opposite side of the stem. Before inserting, they are dipped in rooting hormone liquid — at New Place Nurseries we currently use Synergol at 1500 ppm.

Cuttings are inserted into either rigid cell trays or Ellepots. This offers more flexibility within the production schedule. Rigid trays are used for *Pieris* cuttings taken earlier in the season because they will be held longer before potting on. Ellepots are used for later cuttings with their shorter holding-over period.

Propagation Media. Cuttings are inserted in a medium consisting of Grodan BU10, peat, and fine bark. Nutrient is Osmocote 12-14 month (Autumn formulation) at 700 g·m⁻³.

Propagation Environment. At New Place we root *Pieris* under glass or polythene, with open mist and a base temperature of 16 to 18°C. Polytunnels, glasshouses, or polythene tents have been used by other nurseries, in each case with bottom heat and either closed or open mist units.

After Care and Potting On. Once *Pieris* cuttings have successfully rooted, then they are weaned. We pot-on when cuttings are at the point of breaking and before the flush extends. Potting is done early in the season, as temperatures are cooler and cuttings are easier to establish. Conductivity problems do not occur. With later potting, as temperatures rise then fertiliser rates are reduced and we then have to liquid feed on the crop, if necessary.

Cuttings are potted on into an open peat, with vine-weevil control incorporated — either suSCon Green or Intercept.

Shading is important at the growing-on stage, to protect the crop from scorch. Pruning is done in early May to produce more breaks. Plants are pruned if there are fewer than 3 to 4 breaks on the plant.