Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories

PLANT HEALTH CARE REPORT

Pieris

Pieris, formerly named andromeda, is an evergreen shrub group with year-round appeal. The most common species is Japanese pieris (*Pieris japonica*) and its many associated cultivars. Mountain pieris (*Pieris floribunda*) is native to North America and is more pest-resistant, but the flowers are less showy. Himalaya pieris (*Pieris formosa*) has larger leaves and good shape but needs an even, cool climate as found mainly in the Pacific Northwest and England.

White-flowering pieris in spring

Flowering clusters are called racemes

Popular Japanese pieris varieties include:

'Crystal': resistant to heat and *Phytophthora*

'Christmas Cheer': pink-flowering; fast-growing

'Mountain Fire': white flowers; new growth has an exceptional red color

'Red Mill': long-lasting flowers; new growth is bright red; good pest resistance; dense growth

'Valley Valentine': long-lasting, pink flowers; dense, upright, fast-growing

Many pieris can grow to a height of 10 to 12 feet with a branch spread of 8 or more feet; however, most cultivars remain smaller. New foliage in the spring is red to bronze depending on the cultivar. Young leaf color is one of the most dramatic aspects of pieris. As the leaves mature, they become a glossy dark green. White, pink, or red flowers are formed in March or April on long dangling chains. Each flower is small, about ¼ inch, and matures to become a small capsule that persists through the winter.

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Pieris is adapted to partial shade but grows well in full sun in cooler climates. Japanese pieris is adapted to plant hardiness zones 4 to 7 while mountain pieris is adapted from zone 4 to 6. Neither species tolerates windy areas. Preferred soils are rich, moist, well drained, and acidic with a pH of 5 to 6. Nutrient deficiencies and root disease commonly occur on soils that are alkaline and poorly drained.

Phytophthora root rot, the most destructive disease affecting this plant group, causes wilting and death. Root disease commonly occurs on plants subjected to soil moisture extremes (too wet or too dry). Canker disease fungi cause dieback of stems and branches, especially following periods of low temperatures or drought. Leaf spot fungi cause damage, especially when there is a rainy spring.

A number of pests damage pieris. Leaf-feeding insects, including lacebugs and mites, weaken the plant and reduce the attractiveness of the foliage. Either of these pests can cause a yellowing of the foliage and premature defoliation. Mountain pieris is resistant to lacebug.

Soilborne, root-feeding nematodes damage the root system leading to a decline in the condition of the plant or predisposing it to winter injury. Since pieris' are evergreen, they can be a food source for deer. Rodents may feed on bark tissues below the snow or mulch line resulting in girdling and death.

Monitoring and Treatment Considerations for Pieris

Early to mid-winter

Inspect plants for deer and rodent damage; apply repellent treatment as needed.

Late winter

Expose and inspect root collar for problems. Add mulch as necessary. Remove dead, dying, diseased, and broken branches. Sample soil for nutrient and pH levels, especially if deficiency symptoms are evident. If plants exhibit decline, sample roots or root collar for Phytophthora root rot and sample soil for nematode analysis.

Early spring

Apply first soil treatment in areas with Phytophthora root rot. Apply fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot disease as needed. Apply dormant treatment to suppress overwintering lacebugs, mites, and scale. Monitor for lacebugs and mites; treat as needed.

Mid-spring

Repeat fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot disease as needed. Monitor for lacebugs and mites; treat as needed. Fertilize, adjust pH, and amend soil according to soil analysis.

Late spring

Repeat fungicide treatment to suppress leaf spot disease as needed. Monitor for lacebugs and mites; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease. Inspect mulch levels and adjust as needed. Remove flower stalks after flowering for better leaf development.

Early summer

Monitor for lacebugs and mites; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

Midsummer to late summer

Apply second soil treatment in areas with Phytophthora root rot. Monitor for lacebugs and mites; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

Fall

If sucking insects were problematic this past growing season, consider treating with an appropriately timed systemic product. Inspect plants for deer and rodent damage; apply repellent treatment as needed. Remove mulch from stem to reduce risk of disease and rodent injury. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize winter injury. Fertilize, adjust pH, and amend soil according to soil analysis.