

Fetterbush

Leucothoe fontanesiana
Ericaceae



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Leucothoe (pronounced lew-KAWTH-oh-ee) is a broadleaf evergreen shrub native to North America. It is found in moist, wooded areas of the Appalachian Mountains, and is often undergrowth to taller acid-loving shrubs such as rhododendron and mountain laurel. It spreads by underground stems, and its thickets were so dense that hunters on horseback were unable to pass through. This gave rise to the common names fetterbush and dog-hobble.

The glossy evergreen leaves are the main feature of Leucothoe, especially in the variegated cultivar 'Girard's Rainbow'. The leaves will turn a bronze or purple shade in the fall and winter. In late April or early May, the shrub produces chains of lightly fragrant white flowers. Its fountain-like growing habit makes it a natural for use as a ground cover, especially on moist, shady banks. Although it grows slowly, mature specimens will reach 3 to

6 feet tall and wide, if left unpruned.

Leucothoe, like other ericaceous plants, requires an acid soil with plenty of organic matter. Though it needs even moisture, excessively wet soil will produce root rot. Plant this shrub in partial to full shade, in a location sheltered from drying winds. The key words for this plant are cool, moist, and shady. It is hardy in USDA zones 4 through 8.

Leucothoe is excellent near the front of a shrub border. Plant it in front of taller shrubs to cover the leggy stems, especially rhododendrons. This shrub looks best when planted in groups or in large masses. Rejuvenate by pruning out old wood every three years or so, after flowering is finished.

Related species:

L. 'Girard's Rainbow'
L. axillaris

Rainbow Leucothoe
Coast Leucothoe

