

The Ficus

(*Ficus sp.*)

General Information: Ficus trees are huge growing trees reaching 60 feet tall and 60 to 70 feet wide. The dense, rounded canopy and gracefully drooping branches made it popular as a landscape tree. The thick, shiny, two to five-inch-long, ever-green leaves generously clothe the long branches, and the tiny figs eventually turn a deep red. Branches will weep toward the ground forming a canopy so dense that nothing grows beneath it.

There are over 600 species of Ficus, most of them tropical and evergreen, although some, most notably *F. carica*, the common fig, are deciduous. Ficus produces a unique "fruit" which is actually an inverted flower. Not all Ficus produce edible fruit.

Ficus is a favored bonsai. Good choice for beginners, because most varieties of Ficus are fast growers, tolerant of heavy pruning. They enjoy most soil and light conditions, including as indoor bonsai. Most Ficus grow "banyan" roots which fall from the leaves. They banyan roots will eventually grow into the ground and become part of the trunk structure. Which proper pruning these root structures can be quite dramatic.

Ficus is one of the most loved bonsai for many reasons. It is an excellent tree for beginners, as most species of Ficus are fast growers, tolerant of most any soil and light conditions, make fine indoor bonsai, and perhaps most importantly, are remarkably forgiving of those just learning bonsai watering techniques. Most Ficus grow "banyan" roots naturally; this feature is often showcased by styling Ficus in dramatic air-root and root-over-rock styles. At the end of this presentation are various Addendum for specific varieties of Ficus.

Some species suitable for bonsai:

* **Ficus altissima:** lofty fig

* **Ficus aurea:** Florida fig

* **Ficus benghalensis:** (synonym: *F. indica*) The true banyan fig/banyan tree. This is considered the world's largest tree because of its spread. Tan to light gray color trunks. Aerial roots are reddish brown. Leaves are dark green, wide oval, leathery and have a small tip with midrib and lateral veins prominent and a distinctive white to yellow. The figs it bears are orange-yellow to red and in pairs.

* **Ficus benjamina:** weeping fig, Benjamin tree - One of the best trees for beginners - inexpensive, readily available, able to be transplanted any time of year, grows in low light, tolerant of erratic watering, develops spectacular banyan roots - what's not to love? Its large leaves, for one, but it can be leaf pruned, and dwarf cultivars, such as 'Too Little' can be had, albeit not as easily or cheaply. It has smooth grey bark, slightly drooping branches and bright green ovate leaves.

* *Ficus benjamina* exotica

* *Ficus benjamina* 'Lucy'

* *Ficus benjamina* 'Natasha'

* *Ficus benjamina* 'Too Little'

* **Ficus burtt-davyi** - Veld fig. The bark is whitish gray with leaves which are soft and slightly pointed. Figs produced begin green with white coloring and turn yellow when ripe. Water when slightly dry and use low nitrogen or a balanced fertilizer. Varieties of the burtt-davyi are the 'nana' which has the smallest leaf of the variety, the 'normal' with moderate leaf size and the 'longfolia' which has the largest leaf of the variety.

* **Ficus buxifolia** - Small, triangular leaves and very good branch ramification for Ficus. Its small green fruit rarely ripens in temperate climates.

* **Ficus carica:** common fig, fig tree - produces edible figs, but has very large leaves, making it suit-

able for only the largest sized bonsai. A Mediterranean tree, it is one of the few deciduous Ficus species.

* **Ficus deltoidea** (also called *F. diversifolia*): mistletoe fig - small, leathery leaves, green or yellow fruit. A lovely houseplant, but reputedly tough to train for bonsai due to lack of trunk thickening and back budding.

* **Ficus erecta:** inu-biwa - Its most noticeable feature is that it will produce figs. Roots easily from cuttings.

* **Ficus ilicina:** laurel fig - An extremely fast grower, even for Ficus! Large leaves (which will reduce somewhat) make it best for large sizes.

* **Ficus macrophylla:** Moreton Bay fig, Australian banyan - glossy, leathery, dark-green leaves.

* **Ficus microcarpa:** banyan, Green Island fig - thick, round, half-dollar sized leaves, which can be reduced.

* **Ficus natalensis:** Natal fig tree - long, leathery, spatula shaped leaves. Will grow air-roots.

* **Ficus neriifolia:** fig, willow-leaf ficus

* **Ficus neriifolia regularis** (also known as *F. salicifolia*): willow-leaf fig

* **Ficus panda** - requires little light, only about 800 Lux.

* **Ficus platypoda:** Australian fig - grows multiple trunks in nature. Will produce small orange-red flowers.

* **Ficus philippinensis** - similar to benjamina, but has smaller leaves and bears pink fruit.

* **Ficus pumila:** creeping fig - oval to heart shaped leaves. A climbing plant, easily trained into root-over-rock style.

* **Ficus religiosa:** Bo tree, peepful fig - a sacred tree in Eastern traditions, the Bo tree has lovely heart-shaped leaves which are pink when young.

* **Ficus retusa:** fig, banyan fig, Indian laurel -



Ficus nerifolia



Willow Leaf Ficus



Tiger Bark Ficus



Root-Over-Rock

Ficus Care Sheet



Ficus benjamina

Brought to you by
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado
(Most of the included information is obtained from several
online sources.)



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*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if
you were to live forever."*
—Mahatma Gandhi—

small, glossy, leathery leaves. Grows especially spectacular banyan roots.

* **Ficus retusa formosanum** - daintier than *F. retusa*, with rounder and thicker leaves.

* **Ficus rubiginosa**: Port Jackson fig, rusty leaved fig - gets its name from the rust-covered down which often coats the undersides of leaves. Needs only about 1000 Lux.

* **Ficus sagitata variegata**: trailing fig - a graceful plant with lovely cream and green leaves, but does not form a thick trunk easily. Will naturally cascade or climb rocks.

* **Ficus salicifolia** (also known as *F. neriifolia regularis*): willow-leaf fig

* **Ficus virens**: spotted fig

Ficus leaves can tell you much about the condition of your tree. I will close with a little chart of how leaves often respond to some common problems:

stunted, black, or deformed buds.....need more light

limp leaves.....need water

buds fall off.....too much water or too cold

leaves turn pale green, then yellow.....severely under-watered

yellow leaves.....dry roots, needs more light

falling green leaves.....too much water, insufficient light

pale leaves.....needs fertilizer

yellow leaves with green veins.....iron deficiency

brown or transparent spots.....fertilizer burns (flush soil, allow to dry before watering)

mottled yellow color.....pest infestation

CARE

Temperature: Hardy in zones 10B through 11. With the exception of *F. carica*, most *Ficus* are tropical, and require temperatures above 55°F. An excellent choice for an indoor bonsai. Indoor *Ficus* appreciate being brought outdoors during summer.

Lighting: *Ficus* trees will grow well in low light but thrive in high light. Make sure not to expose your *Ficus* to direct afternoon sun in the summer. *Ficus* trees are great inside but appreciate being taken outside in the summer.

Air: They don't like drafts or fluctuations in temperature or moisture.

Watering: Keep your *Ficus* moderately wet. Water your tree well in the summer and decrease watering in the winter. *Ficus* are very tolerant of being over or under watered, which makes them ideal for beginners. Some, such as the *neriifolia* and *burtt-davyi*, prefer to be on the dry side. Never allow any *Ficus* to dry out completely. *Ficus* likes a daily misting to maintain humidity.

Fertilizing: pH Requirements: 6.5 to 7.5. Every two weeks during the growing season and decrease in the winter. *Ficus* trees respond almost immediately to fertilizing with new growth.

Pruning / Training: Leaf pruning can be used to reduce leaf size. Prune back to 2-4 leaves after 6-10 leaves have grown. Watch out, a *Ficus* will bleed a milky latex profusely when it's pruned (They're in the rubber tree family). It can be messy but when the latex dries, it forms its own natural seal. Pruning with dull cutters will eliminate some of the bleeding. *Ficus* can be wired, but become quite stiff when lignified, and thus are best wired while the shoots are a bit green. Watch carefully to see that the wire doesn't bite in, as *Ficus* is a very fast grower.

Insects / Pests: Scale, eelworm, black fly, thrips. Diseases: Anthracnose fungus and various forms of rot.

Propagation: One of the easiest plant to root from cuttings; although the specifics for maximum success vary with species. Very large diameter cuttings of *Ficus* can be successfully rooted. Air-layering is also quite easy. *Ficus* can be grown from seed, but require heat and humidity, and easily succumb to mold.

Repotting: Every 2-3 years, although some will grow rapidly enough that yearly repotting may be necessary. *Ficus* is the single most forgiving bonsai in terms of repotting season. The best time is before a new growth spurt, especially in spring, but *Ficus* can literally be repotted any time of year if reasonable after-care is given. Roots can easily be pruned by half. Basic bonsai soil is recommended, although *Ficus* tolerates many soil conditions.

Design and Styling: *Ficus* are suitable for most styles of bonsai, but are especially suitable for styles which make use of their property of extensive rooting, such as air-root and root-over-rock styles. *Ficus* can be used for all sizes of bonsai, although, obviously, the small-leaved species make the best miniature bonsai.