

## Tree Profile: *Ficus Rubiginosa*- Port Jackson Fig

**General information:** According to Wikipedia the Ficus is a genus of about 850 species of woody trees, shrubs and vines, collectively known as fig trees or figs and is one of the most loved bonsai for many reasons.

***Ficus rubiginosa*** (Port Jackson Fig) is just one of them but arguably the best for bonsai. The oval leaves are glossy green and measure from 2 to 19.5cm long and 0.5 to 13.5cm wide. Mature trees have a yellow-brown buttressed trunk.

It is an excellent tree for beginners, as most species of Ficus are fast growers, tolerant of most any soil and light conditions. They make fine indoor bonsai, and perhaps most importantly, are remarkably forgiving of those just learning bonsai watering techniques. Most Ficus grow "banyan" roots (aerial roots) naturally; this feature is often showcased by styling Ficus in dramatic air-root and root-over-rock styles.

**Lighting:** Like most Ficus it will grow decently in low light, but thrive in high light conditions of about 7 hours - morning to early afternoon.

**Temperature:** An excellent choice for an indoor bonsai. Indoor Ficus appreciate being left outdoors during summer. They don't like draughts, protect from frost.

**Watering:** This species enjoys ample water, 'immersion' watering in summer and decreasing in winter. Many Ficus are very tolerant of being over or under watered, which makes them ideal for beginners. Indoors Ficus like a daily misting to maintain humidity. Outdoors sitting them on a tray with water in summer with the increased humidity will encourage the growth of aerial roots!

**Feeding:** Every two weeks during growth period using a half-strength liquid fertilizer, none between April to August. Larger leaves develop if over fertilized!

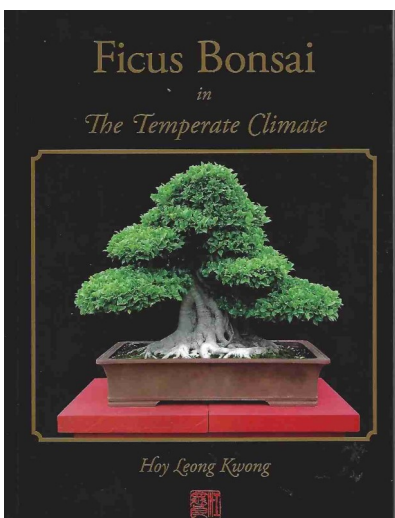
**Pruning and wiring:** Port Jackson fig can be styled to most bonsai styles and is very amenable to pruning, but are especially suitable for styles which make use of their property of extensive rooting, such as air-root and root-over-rock styles. Ficus can be used for all sizes of bonsai, although, obviously, the small-leaved species make the best miniature bonsai. Prune back to 1-4 leaves after 6-10 leaves have grown. Regular defoliation (up to 3 times per season for healthy trees) will improve ramification substantially. Any Ficus will bleed heavily - a milky latex, which a drop of water will stop.

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.

**Propagation:** One of the easiest plant to root from cuttings; although the specifics for maximum success vary with species, it's always worth sticking them into soil for the heck of it!

**Repotting:** Every 2-3 years in a well draining and neutral to slightly acidic mix, 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, when the weather is warm, but Ficus can literally be repotted any time of year if reasonable after-care is given. Roots can easily be pruned by half.

**Pests and diseases:** Scale, eelworm, black fly, thrips, Anthracnose fungus, various forms of rot. Some ficus will lose leaves if overwatered or given too little light.



Recommended text book for ficus bonsai cultivation is "Ficus Bonsai in the Temperate Climate", by Hoy Leong Kwong. Hopefully, we will have a copy in our Club library soon. For anybody wishing to purchase a copy, see Zyggy R for details of suppliers.