

Tree Profile: Fig Tree—*Ficus*

General information: *Ficus* a genus of about 850 species of woody trees, shrubs and vines, collectively known as fig trees or figs, 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.

Lighting: Most *Ficus* will grow decently in low light, but thrive in high light conditions.

Temperature: An excellent choice for an indoor bonsai. Indoor *Ficus* appreciate being brought outdoors during summer. Does not like draughts.

Watering: Moderate, increasing in summer and decreasing in winter. Many *Ficus* are very tolerant of being over or under watered, which makes them ideal for beginners. *Ficus* likes a daily misting to maintain humidity.

Feeding: Every two weeks during growth, every 4-6 in winter, using a half-strength plant food or a bonsai fertilizer.

Pruning and wiring: *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. *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. Prune back to 2-4 leaves after 6-10 leaves have grown. *Ficus* will bleed a milky latex profusely, which a drop of water will stop.

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, 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.

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

Some species suitable for bonsai:

Ficus benjamina: weeping fig, Benjamin tree - One of the best trees for beginners

Ficus buxifolia - Small, triangular leaves and very good branch ramification for *Ficus*.

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

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

Ficus neriifolia: fig, willow-leaf ficus

Ficus retusa: fig, banyan fig, Indian laurel - small, glossy, leathery leaves.

Grows especially spectacular banyan roots.

Ficus rubiginosa: Port Jackson fig, rusty covered undersides of leaves.



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