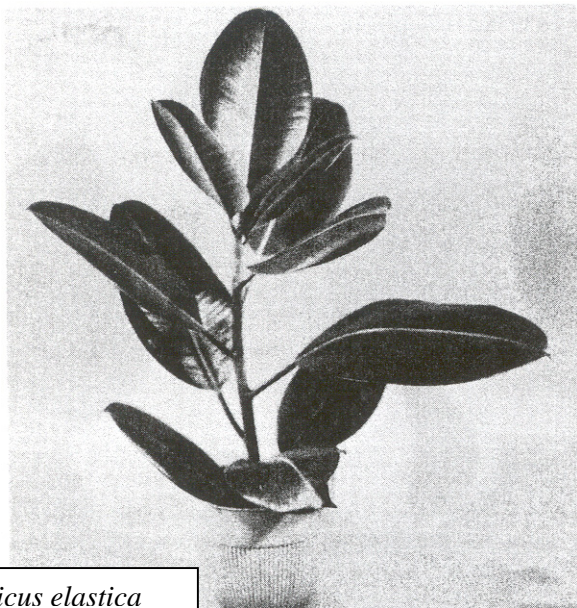


Care and Selection of Ficus



Ficus elastica

For variety of texture and size, *Ficus* species are some of the most useful foliage plants for interior decorating. For instance, Weeping Fig has a light airy texture but Indian Rubber Plant is bold and heavy textured while Creeping Fig is a small-leaved climbing vine. Weeping Figs and Indian Rubber Plants are quite large, whereas, Creeping Figs are small vines. *Ficus* species, members of the Mulberry family (Moraceae), are more or less woody.

Ficus species thrive best in an area where bright sun in summer is reduced to about one-third its brightness and in winter to one-half or two-thirds. The creeping figs are naturally forest floor inhabitants; therefore, their light requirement is greatly reduced. A north window is usually ideal.

Figs also thrive in warm temperatures and high humidity. A 40% relative humidity is a minimum for undisturbed growth. It must be remembered that the higher the light and temperature the greater the need for humidity and frequency of watering. Most foliage plants require constant moisture but never wet conditions. Therefore, a well-drained soil is required to prevent excessive wetness and at the same time provide constant moisture. A porous, fibrous, well-drained medium is essential for proper growth. A mixture of three parts coarse, fertile loam, one part peat, and one part coarse sand is a suitable growing media. To each bushel add ¼ cup superphosphate, and lime only if the loam is acidic.

Figs do well in deep containers with gravel or broken crock covering the bottom to aid drainage. Transplanting is best done in late spring after the plant has resumed growth but this process is not necessary as often as with other plants since they do quite well when slightly root bound. It is not uncommon to have partially exposed roots so never plant deeper than the original level. During active growth, monthly fertilization is suggested with a water-soluble fertilizer.



Ficus beniamina

Most *Ficus* species are propagated by air layering since tip cuttings take much longer to produce a sizable plant. To begin the air layering process, make a diagonal cut 1/3 into the stem about a foot below the tip. Keep the cut open with moist sphagnum peat then enclose the cut area with moist peat and cover with plastic, sealing both ends. In three weeks to three months, roots will be visible through the plastic. Sever the stem below the roots and plant in an appropriate media. The severed stem below the cut will sprout new leaves.

Ficus are subject to scale insects, aphids and mealybugs but they can be controlled by use of malathion. *Ficus* species are also susceptible to dry air, drafts and dust. Thus it is recommended they be maintained in humid air, away from drafts. Occasional leaf cleaning is also recommended.

Recommended Species and Varieties.

Ficus benjamina – Weeping Fig. This graceful, delicate textured fig produces a dense growth of shiny deep green foliage. Its drooping branches may form aerial roots.

Ficus benjamina ‘Exotica’ – Java Fig. This attractive cultivar of the Weeping Fig has slender arching branches with pendulous tips. Its glossy green, leathery foliage has a slight twist at the tips.

Ficus elastica – Indian Rubber Plant. This durable houseplant with oblong leathery leaves has an erect single stem habit when young. Older plants branch and develop woody stems. Its young leaves arise from an attractive rosy sheath.

Ficus elastica ‘Decora’. Its broader and larger, heavier leaves with prominent, depressed veins have ivory midribs that are red beneath. The sheath surrounding the young leaves is also red.

Ficus elastica ‘Doescheri’. A true variegated form with streaks of gray, white and creamy yellow. Its midrib and leaf stalks are pink.

Ficus lyrata – Fiddleleaf Fig. This easy to grow fig has dark, shreddy bark in contrast to its deep green waxy leaves. The fiddle-shaped leaves also have attractive yellow-green veins.

Ficus pumila – Creeping Fig. In contrast to other figs commonly used as houseplants, the Creeping Fig is a freely branching vine with small heart-shaped leaves. Its holdfasts enable it to cling to walls. It is commonly misnamed *Ficus repens*, *Ficus scandens*, or *Ficus stipulata*.

Prepared by Cynthia D. Mitchell
Department of Horticulture
The Ohio State University

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