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# figus



Photo courtesy of The John Henry Company

## BOTANICAL NAME

*Ficus* spp. (FY-kus)

## COMMON NAME

Ornamental fig

## DESCRIPTION

The *Ficus* genus encompasses numerous species of figs, ranging from grand trees to climbing vines. Characteristics of the various *Ficus* species vary dramatically, but most display either a broad oval leaf or a narrow pointed leaf. The broad leaves are typically dark green although new varieties have been hybridized for a wealth of intriguing colorations. Narrow leaves are typically medium to light green—some species feature variega-

tion—and may be pointed or round. When grown outdoors, figs are, of course, fruit-bearing plants; as houseplants, they do not exhibit this tasty trait. Common houseplant species include *F. pumila* (creeping fig or climbing fig), *F. lyrata* (fiddleleaf fig or banjo fig) and *F. microcarpa* or *F. retusa* (Indian laurel, Chinese banyan or Malay banyan).

## DECORATIVE LIFE

With proper care, these plants can last indoors for five years or longer, depending on species. *F. lyrata*, or fiddleleaf fig, could last as long as 10 years.

## AVAILABILITY

Most species are available year-round.

*Ficus microcarpa*—Indian laurel, Chinese banyan

## in-store and consumer care

**LIGHT** Bright to moderate indirect or filtered light is best for most fig species. As houseplants, most *Ficuses* do not tolerate direct sunlight.

**WATER** Most figs prefer their soil to be slightly moist at all times.

**TEMPERATURE** Average to warm temperatures, ranging from 60 F to 85 F, are best.

**HUMIDITY** Moderate to high humidity is ideal, but most of today's houseplants are grown to tolerate humidity levels typically found in homes. Occasional misting will be beneficial, especially for the vining types.

**FERTILIZER** Fiddleleaf figs require a high-nitrogen plant food just three times each year—spring, summer and fall. Other species thrive with monthly treatments using balanced houseplant foods.

**PROPAGATION** The nonwoody species, such as *F. pumila*, can be propagated with stem cuttings. Otherwise, air layering, a process of encouraging stems to grow roots while still attached to the main plant, is used.

**PRUNING** Wintertime pruning may be useful to maintain desired shape, and any branches seriously infested with scale insects should be pruned as well.



Photo courtesy of Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.

*F. lyrata* 'Little Fiddle'—Fiddleleaf fig

**REPOTTING** Repot in spring every two years using an all-purpose potting soil that drains well. Select a new pot that is only an inch or two larger in diameter than the previous one.

## challenges

**PESTS AND PROBLEMS** Mealybugs, spider mites and scale insects are sometimes known to infest various *Ficus* species. Treatments with insecticidal soap are effective against mealybugs and spider mites. Treat scale with a soap-oil spray followed, in a day or two, by a washing with warm water.

**LEAF CONCERNS** *Ficuses* do not tolerate changes in environment well, so once in place in stores or homes, they may shed leaves in response to any moves. Within a few weeks, however, they will adapt to their new locations. Rotate them to allow

## fun facts

**WHAT'S IN A NAME** The name *Ficus* is derived from the Latin word for "edible fig."

**FAMILY** *Ficus* plants are members of the *Moraceae* (mulberry) family of trees and shrubs, most of which produce a sticky sap. In addition to mulberries, close relatives include breadfruit, jackfruit and osage oranges.

**HOME SWEET HOME** *Ficuses* are tropical plants and most are native to Southeast Asia and West Africa. Some species are found in Australia as well.

full exposure to light.

Improper watering is also a source of leaf problems. Too much water will usually cause leaves to turn yellow; insufficient water will cause them to turn brown. Regular light watering is key to vibrant leaf color and to avoiding root rot, to which this plant is also susceptible. **sfr**

Some information provided by:  
Chain of Life Network®, [www.chainoflifenetWORK.org](http://www.chainoflifenetWORK.org)  
The Complete Houseplant Survival Manual,  
by Barbara Pleasant  
Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.,  
[www.exoticangel.com](http://www.exoticangel.com)  
The House Plant Expert, by Dr. D.G. Hessayon

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