



Ficus elastica Rubber Tree¹

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INTRODUCTION

Often seen as an interior container plant, Rubber Tree has large, 5 to 12-inch-long, thick, glossy evergreen leaves, multiple trunks, and a spreading, irregular canopy (Fig. 1). Able to reach 100 feet in height in its native habitat in the jungle but most often seen at about 25 to 40 feet in the landscape, Rubber Tree is useful as a screen, shade, patio, or specimen tree. Its coarse texture makes a strong statement in the landscape. Use as a street tree is limited by the tree's tendency to break apart in strong winds. Perhaps the tree could be made stronger by removing branches with weak tight-angle crotches and spacing major lateral branches along one central trunk. Eliminate multiple trunks early in the life of the tree and prune lateral branches so they remain smaller than half the diameter of the trunk to increase longevity in the landscape.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Ficus elastica*

Pronunciation: FYE-kuss ee-LASS-tick-uh

Common name(s): Rubber Tree, India-Rubber Fig

Family: *Moraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; suitable for growing indoors; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance



Figure 1. Young Rubber Tree.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 45 feet

Spread: 25 to 30 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: oval

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy;

should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

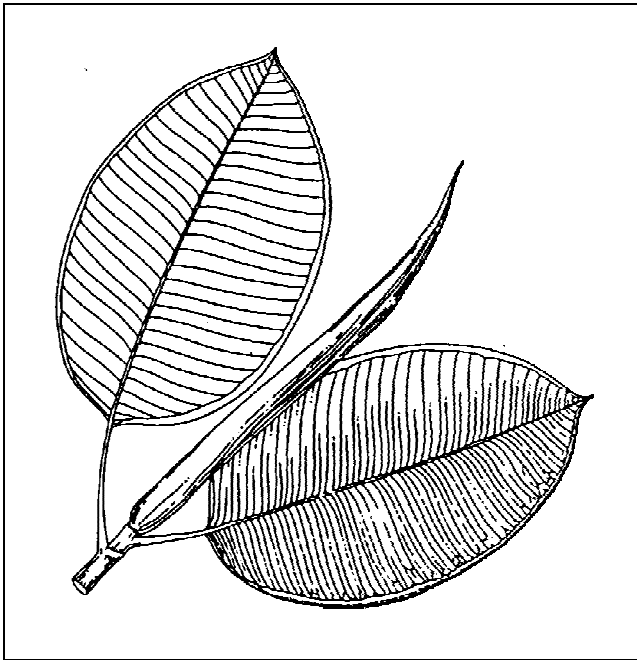


Figure 3. Foliage of Rubber Tree.

Propagation is by layering or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally scales are a problem.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic;
occasionally wet; alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere
with mowing

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Rubber Tree will grow quickly in sun or partial shade on almost any well-drained soil. The soil should be allowed to become fairly dry between waterings, especially in containers. Rubber Tree makes a nice house plant if it is not over-watered.

Available cultivars include: 'Doescheri' has yellow-variegated leaves; 'Decora' produces broad, reddish-green leaves with ivory-colored veins running down center of leaf; 'Variegata' has light green leaves with white or yellow margins.