

FICUS SP. CARE

General Background:

The Ficus Tree is a true gem in the world of bonsai, holding the prestigious title of being one of the best-selling bonsai trees. Its popularity is owed to a combination of factors, including accessibility, aesthetic appeal, and rapid growth. These factors make it a favorite among both beginners and seasoned enthusiasts for the art of bonsai.

This comprehensive care guide will help you cultivate and nurture a thriving Ficus bonsai.

Features:

Ficus is a diverse genus of trees, shrubs, and vines within the fig family (Moraceae). They are part of a plant genus with over 800 species; however, only a small portion of the Ficus species are suitable for bonsai trees.

Here are some common types of Ficus bonsai trees:

- Ficus Microcarpa (Ginseng & Tiger Bark Ficus): Also known as the Chinese Banyan, it has thick, aerial roots that form a bulbous base resembling ginseng roots. It's a popular choice for its unique appearance.

- *Ficus Retusa* (Banyan Fig): Similar to *Ficus Microcarpa*, this variety has smaller leaves and is often used for traditional banyan-style bonsai. It can develop a prominent aerial root system.
- *Ficus Benjamina* (Weeping Fig): Known for its slender, drooping branches and small, glossy leaves. It's a favorite for its graceful appearance and adaptability to indoor environments.
- *Ficus Salicaria* (Narrow-Leafed Fig): Also called the Willow Leaf Ficus, it's recognized by its long, narrow leaves and upright growth habit. It's often used to create the formal upright style in bonsai.
- *Ficus Natalensis* (Natal Fig): Notable for its compact growth and small, dark green leaves. It is often used for informal upright or cascade styles.
- *Ficus Religiosa* (Sacred Fig or Bo Tree): A revered tree in many cultures, known for its heart-shaped leaves and spiritual significance. It's a popular choice for bonsai due to its unique foliage.
- *Ficus Burtt-Davyi* (Natal Fig): Known for its small, ovate leaves and compact growth habit, making it suitable for small to medium-sized bonsai.
- *Ficus Crassifolia* (Mistletoe Fig): Characterized by its twisted, gnarled trunk and branches, resembling a mistletoe. It's an intriguing choice for bonsai enthusiasts.

Each type of Ficus bonsai plant offers unique characteristics in terms of leaf size, growth patterns, bark texture, and overall appearance. The choice of which Ficus to grow as a bonsai depends on your preferences, the style you wish to create, and the environment in which you intend to grow your bonsai.

The Ficus Microcarpa 'Tiger Bark' is the most popular of Ficus. These are generally imported from China, re-established in the USA, then sold as beginner bonsai trees.

Temperature:

Ficus sp. prefers temperatures between 50 and 71 degrees Fahrenheit, with a preference for outdoor exposure during summer. These species can thrive indoors near bright windows but prefer humid outdoor conditions during the summer. It is critical to protect specimens from freezing temperatures, and care should be taken in any climate where temperatures can drop below 50 degrees.

Lighting:

Ficus sp. Are tropical/jungle species. They prefer bright indirect sunlight as leaves can sunburn in hot direct sun. Aim for 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily. During winter place P. Afra in southern windows or supplement with grow lights.

Watering:

Ficus sp. Are tropical species and therefore prefer moderately humid climates. Water when the soil is nearly completely dry. Be sure soil is fast draining to prevent root rot. Water more frequently during the summer and less frequently during winter months.

Fertilizing:

Typical growing season spans from early spring to early autumn. Fertilize with well balanced diluted liquid fertilizer every two to four weeks during the growing season. Winter fertilizing is at the discretion of the winter climate: if your tree continues to show growth, continue feeding.

Pruning / Training:

Ficus sp. is very receptive to directional pruning. Pruning should consist of cutting branches back to a pair of healthy leaves. Wiring may be used with caution. Ficus are able to be wired into position, but care should be taken to not leave wiring on too long. As ficus are fast growers, wire bite is a common side effect. Inspect wired branches monthly to prevent wire bite as soon as it is noted.

Insects / Pests:

Ficus sp. can be affected by a number of pests including scale insects, mealybugs and Aphids. These tend to emerge during warmer and more humid months, particularly when conditions are damp. They primarily target the tender new growth that emerges in

spring. In both cases, rinse well with water and spray the plant thoroughly with insecticidal soap. Repeat in 5-7 days to ensure all pests have been removed.

Propagation:

Propagation of ficus sp. can be readily accomplished through stem cuttings. Take a healthy cutting and plant it in a well-draining soil mix. Keep the soil lightly moist until roots establish.

Repotting:

Repot mature (7+ year old specimens) every two to three years in late spring. Younger specimens may require yearly repotting due to prolific growth habit. All ficus sp should be potted in well draining soil. Up to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the root mass can be pruned off healthy specimens.

Additional Comments:

Some ficus can quickly grow out of control without proper pruning and maintenance. Consider a bi-monthly pruning schedule to prevent plants from becoming tall, thin and “leggy”.

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