

Ficus Bonsai tree

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The ficus genus belongs to the family of mulberry plants (Moraceae) and is the most popular indoor tree species for beginners at Bonsai. There is differing information about the number of existing ficus species, there may be between 800 and 2000. They live on all continents in the tropical regions and are very suitable for being kept as indoor Bonsai.

There are hundreds of varieties of the Ficus, but the most popular one for Bonsai is the **Ficus Retusa**, which is often shaped in an s-curved trunk and has oval, dark green leaves. The Microcarpa, Tigerbark, Willow leaf, Golden Gate, Ficus Religiosa, Benjamina and Taiwan varieties are quite similar to the Retusa. The **Ficus Ginseng** is another popular tree. It has a thick, pot-bellied trunk, similar to the Ginseng root. Sometimes it is grafted with Ficus microcarpa leaves (combining it to a ficus microcarpa ginseng).

Some figs can become very large trees with a crown circumference of more than 300 m (1000 ft). Typical for all fig Bonsai species is their milky latex sap, which will leak from wounds or cuts. The tropical figs are evergreen trees, small shrubs or even climbing plants. Some of them can produce nice flowers, while most ficus species have hidden flowers in small receptacles from which the fruit grow. Only specialized pollinating fig wasps can pollinate those hidden flowers. The fruit can be yellow, green, red or purple-blue and are between a few millimeters to several centimeters, like the edible fruit of Ficus carica.

Most ficus Bonsai trees can produce aerial roots in their natural habitat, which are often presented in appealing Bonsai creations with many aerial root pillars or root over rock styles. To enable aerial root growth in our homes a humidity of nearly 100% must be achieved artificially. You can use a glass cover, fish tank or a construction with transparent sheets for this purpose. Aerial roots grow down vertically from the branches and when they reach the soil they develop into strong pillar-like trunks. In tropical climates a single tree can become a forest-like structure and cover an enormous expanse.

The leaves of most Bonsai ficus species have special pointed tips from which the rainwater drips off. The leaves can be of very different sizes, between 2 and 50 cm long (1 – 20 inches). The trunks have a smooth grey bark in most cases. There are a few species or varieties however with special bark patterns, like the ficus microcarpa „Tigerbark“ for example. Ficus Ginseng Bonsai plants are poisonous for pets, it can be especially dangerous if they eat the leaves. The trees should be placed out of the pets' reach.

Specific Bonsai care guidelines for the Ficus Bonsai

Position: The ficus Bonsai tree is an indoor Bonsai which cannot endure frost. It can be kept outside in summer, if temperatures are above 15 degrees C (59F) and it needs lots of light – full sun is ideal, in the house as well as outside if the tree is exposed to the ultraviolet radiation gradually or if it is defoliated before placing the tree outside. A very shady position is unfavorable. The temperature should be kept relatively constant. Figs can endure low humidity due to their thick, waxy leaves, but they prefer a higher humidity and need extremely high humidity to develop aerial roots.

Watering: The Ficus should be watered normally, which means it should be given water generously whenever the soil gets slightly dry. The Bonsai Ficus can tolerate occasional over- or under-watering. Soft water with room temperature is perfect. Daily misting to maintain humidity is advised, don't overdo this otherwise fungal problems can appear. The warmer the position of the fig during winter the more water it needs. If it overwinters at a cooler place it only needs to be kept slightly moist. Continue reading about watering Bonsai trees.

Fertilizing: Fertilize weekly or every two weeks during summer, every two to four weeks during winter (if the growth doesn't stop). Liquid fertilizer can be used as well as organic fertilizer pellets.



Pruning: Regular pruning is necessary to retain the tree's shape. Prune back to 2 leaves after 6-8 leaves have grown. Leaf pruning can be used to reduce leaf size, as some ficus Bonsai species normally grow large leaves. If a considerable thickening of the trunk is desired, the ficus can be left to grow freely for one or two years. The strong cuts that are necessary afterwards don't affect the ficus' health and new shoots will grow from old wood. Larger wounds should be covered with cut paste. Continue reading about pruning Bonsai trees.

Wiring: Wiring of thin to medium-strong ficus branches is easy as they are very flexible. The wires should be checked regularly though, as they cut into the bark very quickly. Strong branches should be shaped with guy-wires because those can be left on the tree for a much longer period.

Special training techniques: Ficus has the ability to fuse plant parts which touch each other with some pressure. So branches, roots or trunks can fuse together and form appealing structures. You can use this feature for example to tie a lot of young plants together and let them fuse to build one strong single trunk. Fig trees also react very well to approach-grafting of branches and roots and to other grafting techniques. If the growing conditions are ideal, even aerial roots taken from one part of the tree can be grafted in a different position. For faster closing of large wounds young plants, shoots or aerial roots can be grafted across the wound. The grower can work on fig trees with nearly unlimited creativity, which increases the appeal of ficus as a Bonsai plant considerably.

Repotting: Repot the tree during spring every other year, using a basic soil mixture. Ficus tolerates root-pruning very well.

Propagation: Cuttings can be planted at any time of the year, but highest success is with mid-summer growth. Air-layering will work best in spring (April – May). Growing ficus plants from seed in spring also works easily in most cases.

Acquisition of ficus ginseng Bonsai: Ficus plants are available as cheap Bonsai or pot plants in nearly every home-store, building supplies store or nursery. Mass-produced cheap Bonsai in most cases bring a lot of problems with them, like ugly scars from rusty wire that bit into the bark, unattractive shapes, often poorly grafted branches in odd positions, bad soil and sometimes inappropriate pots without drainage holes. Specialized Bonsai traders offer everything from young plants, pre-Bonsai and pre-styled ficus trees up to high-value Bonsai, in most cases well-tended and of good quality.

Pests / diseases: The fig species are quite resistant against pests. Depending on the location, especially in winter, a number of problems can occur anyway. Dry air and a lack of light weaken the Bonsai ficus and often result in leaf drop. In a poor condition like this, ficus Bonsai are sometimes infested with scale or spider mites. Customary systemic insecticide sticks to put into the soil or insecticide / miticide sprays will work, but the weakened ficus' living conditions must also be improved. Plant lamps (shining 12 – 14 hours a day) and frequent misting of the leaves during the recovery can be helpful.