

# Ficus aurea: Strangler Fig<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Often starting out as an epiphyte nestled in the limbs of another tree, the native Strangler Fig is vine-like while young, later strangling its host with heavy aerial roots and eventually becoming a self-supporting, independent tree. Not recommended for small landscapes, Strangler Fig grows quickly and can reach 60 feet in height with an almost equal spread. The broad, spreading, lower limbs are festooned with secondary roots which create many slim but rigid trunks once they reach the ground and take hold. They become a maintenance headache as these roots need to be removed to keep a neat-looking landscape. The shiny, thick, dark green leaves create dense shade and the surface roots add to the problem of maintaining a lawn beneath

this massive tree. The fruit drops and makes a mess beneath the tree.

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Ficus aurea*

**Pronunciation:** FYE-kuss AR-ee-uh

**Common name(s):** Strangler Fig, Golden Fig

**Family:** *Moraceae*

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

**Origin:** native to North America

**Invasive potential:** weedy native

**Uses:** indoors; reclamation; Bonsai

**Availability:** not native to North America

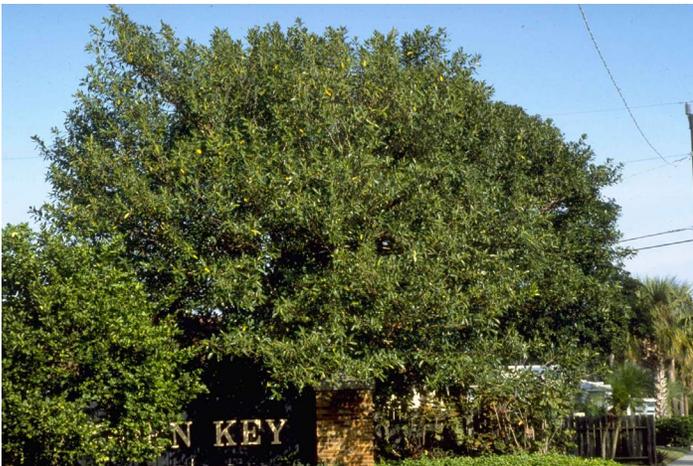


Figure 1. Mature *Ficus aurea*: Strangler Fig  
Credits: Ed Gilman



Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH409, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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## Description

**Height:** 50 to 60 feet

**Spread:** 50 to 70 feet

**Crown uniformity:** irregular

**Crown shape:** spreading, round

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** undulate, entire

**Leaf shape:** ovate, elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

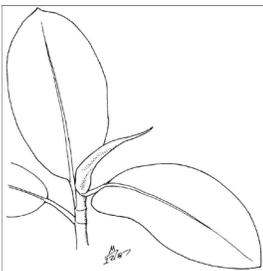


Figure 3. Foliage

## Flower

**Flower color:** unknown

**Flower characteristics:** not showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** oval, round

**Fruit length:** less than .5 inch

**Fruit covering:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** green, yellow

**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant

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

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

## Other

**Roots:** can form large surface roots

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** no

**Ozone sensitivity:** unknown

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** unknown

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

## Use and Management

Easily grown in full sun or partial shade, Strangler Fig can literally be planted, watered a few times, and forgotten. A variety of soils, including wet, will do, and Strangler Fig is moderately salt-tolerant. More often than not, large Strangler Figs were existing trees, not planted. Seeds germinate easily in the landscape allowing the tree to invade nearby land.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

## Pests

Primary pests are aphids and scales followed by sooty mold.

## Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.