

***Ficus aurea*: Strangler Fig¹**

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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 (Figure 1)

Origin: native to Florida, southern Mexico to Panama, and western Caribbean Islands

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: native

Uses: indoors; reclamation; Bonsai



Figure 1. Range

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

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

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: 2 to 5 inches

Leaf color: dark green on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 2. Leaf—*Ficus aurea*: strangler fig attached to a different tree species.

Flower

Flower color: unknown

Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges inside the fleshy fruit produced by this tree

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval, round

Fruit length: ½ to ¾ inch

Fruit covering: fleshy fig

Fruit color: green to red, burgundy, or purple when ripe

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

Fruiting: spring and summer



Figure 3. Fruit—*Ficus aurea*: strangler fig

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns

Bark: tan, smooth, and broken twigs excrete a milky sap

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 4. Bark—*Ficus aurea*: strangler fig

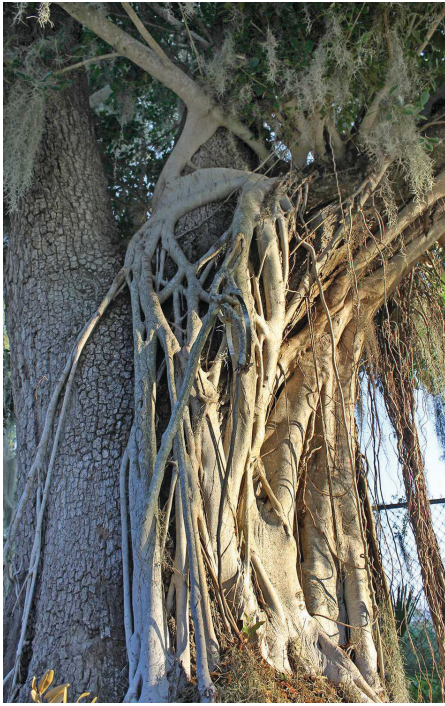


Figure 5. Aerial Roots—*Ficus aurea*: strangler fig
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, to 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.

References

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