

Ficus benjamina: Weeping Fig¹

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Introduction

This is a huge tree growing to 60 feet tall and 60 to 100 feet wide. The dense, rounded canopy and gracefully drooping branches of weeping fig made it quite popular as a landscape tree until recently. The thick, shiny, two to four-inch-long, evergreen leaves generously clothe the long branches, and the tiny figs eventually turn a yellow, orange, or dark red when ripe. Branches will weep toward the ground forming a canopy so dense that nothing grows beneath it.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ficus benjamina*

Pronunciation: FYE-kuss ben-juh-MYE-nuh

Common name(s): Weeping fig

Family: *Moraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: Not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

Uses: trained as a standard; indoors; container or planter; hedge; Bonsai

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 1. Full Form—*Ficus benjamina*: Weeping fig

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Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 40 to 60 feet

Spread: 60 to 100 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: weeping, round, spreading

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate, entire

Leaf shape: narrowly lanceolate to ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: dark to medium green and shiny on top, paler green underneath

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Ficus benjamina*: Weeping fig

Flower

Flower color: unknown

Flower characteristics: not showy; emerges in clusters within syconium produced by the tree

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: ⅓ to ½ inch

Fruit covering: fleshy fig

Fruit color: turns from green to yellow, orange, or dark red when ripe

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



Figure 4. Fruit—*Ficus benjamina*: Weeping fig

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; no thorns; broken branches excrete a milky sap

Bark: gray to pale brown, smooth

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: gray

Current year twig thickness: thin

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet but 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: susceptible

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases



Figure 5. Bark—*Ficus benjamina*: Weeping fig
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Use and Management

Fruit can stain cars and sidewalks, so the tree should not be planted close to streets, walks or parking lots. It also makes quite a mess around the tree as the fruit fall to the ground. The tree is much too large for residential planting unless it is used as a hedge or clipped screen, but can be seen growing into massive trees in parks and other large-scale areas. Aerial roots descend from the branches, touch the ground and take root, eventually forming numerous sturdy trunks which can clog a landscape. Trees can grow to be quite large and spreading in this fashion. Roots grow rapidly invading gardens, growing under and lifting sidewalks, patios, and driveways.

There have been recent reports of fertile fruit germinating in some landscapes in south Florida. This is of concern since this could give the tree the potential of spreading and perhaps becoming a pesky weed, something which is definitely not needed in south Florida.

Able to tolerate severe pruning, weeping fig can also be successfully used as a clipped hedge or screen and is probably best used in this fashion, or can be trained into an espalier or topiary. Young trees are often grown in containers, appearing on patios, at entranceways, or indoors.

Weeping Fig will grow in full sun or partial shade on any well-drained soil. Plants should be carefully watered when young and later during droughts. Plants are very frost-sensitive.

The cultivar 'Exotica' has wavy-edged leaves with long, twisted tips. There are other *Ficus* species such as *Ficus rubiginosa* which do not produce aerial roots and are much better suited as landscape trees for shade because they will not take over the landscape as will weeping fig.

Propagation is by cuttings or layering.

Pests

Weeping fig may be infected by scales, but is resistant to leaf thrips which will distort new leaves on some other figs.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.