UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

ENH412

Ficus elastica 'Variegata': 'Variegata' Rubber Tree[1]

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Introduction

Often seen as an interior container plant, variegated rubber tree has large, 5 to 12-inch-long, thick, light green leaves with white or yellow margins, multiple trunks, and a spreading, irregular canopy. Able to reach 100 feet in height in its native habitat in the jungle but most often seen at about 25 to 40 feet in the landscape, rubber tree is useful as a screen, shade, patio, or specimen tree. Its coarse texture makes a strong statement in the landscape. Use as a street tree is limited by the tree's tendency to break apart in high winds. Perhaps the tree could be made stronger by removing branches with weak tight-angle crotches and spacing major lateral branches along one central trunk. Eliminate multiple trunks early in the life of the tree and prune lateral branches so they remain smaller than half the diameter of the trunk to increase longevity in the landscape.

General Information

Scientific name: *Ficus elastica*

Pronunciation: FYE-kuss ee-LASS-tick-uh

Common name(s): 'Variegata' rubber tree, 'Variegata' India-rubber fig

Family: *Moraceae*

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

Origin: not native to North America

Outstanding tree: no

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

Uses: shade; trained as a standard; indoors; screen; specimen; deck or patio; container or planter; espalier; highway median

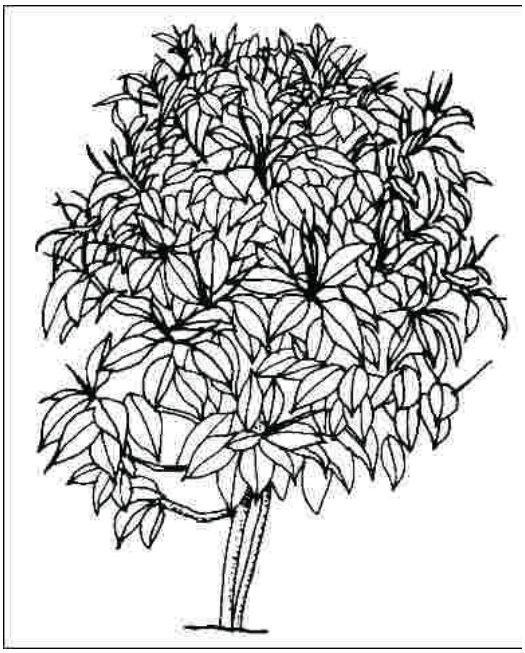

Figure 1. Young *Ficus elastica* 'Variegata': 'Variegata' rubber tree. Credits: UF/IFAS

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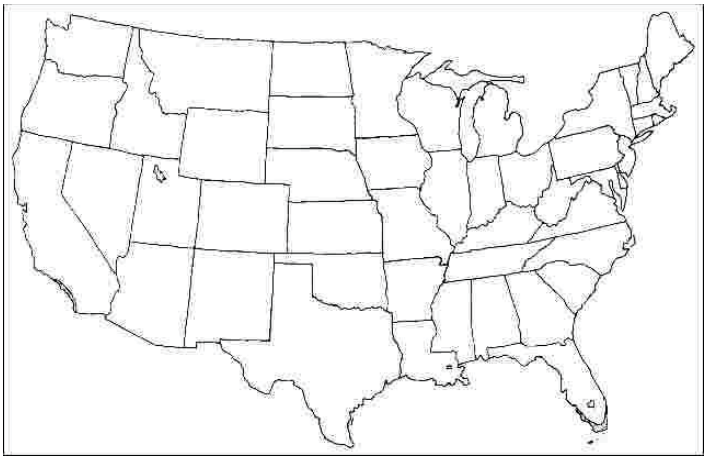

Figure 2. Range
Credits: UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 30 to 45 feet

Spread: 25 to 30 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: oval

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Figure 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: variegated

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

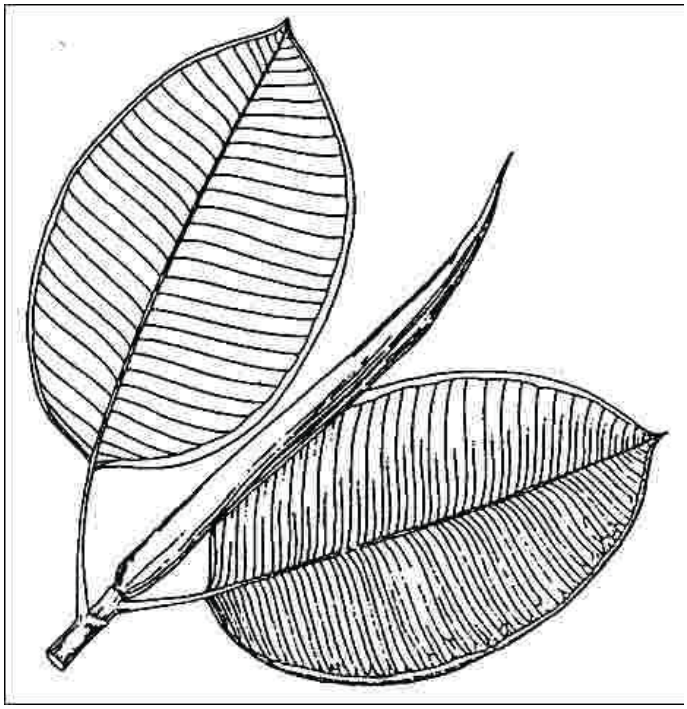

Figure 3. Foliage.
Credits: UF/IFAS

Flower

Flower color: unknown

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: green

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

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

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

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

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Rubber Tree will grow quickly in sun or partial shade on almost any well-drained soil. The soil should be allowed to become fairly dry between waterings, especially in containers. Rubber Tree makes a nice house plant if it is not over-watered.

Other available cultivars include: 'Doescheri' has yellow-variegated leaves; 'Decora' produces broad, reddish-green leaves with ivory-colored veins running down the center of the leaf.

Propagation is by layering or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally scales are a problem.