

Ficus benjamina 'Green Gem': 'Green Gem' Cuban-Laurel¹

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, and Deborah R. Hilbert²

Introduction

This rapidly growing, rounded, broad-headed, evergreen tree can reach 50 feet or more in height with an equal spread. The glossy, dark green, leathery leaves are densely clothed on large, somewhat weeping branches and unlike the species, are not usually infested with thrips. New growth, produced all year long, is a light rose to chartreuse color, giving the tree a lovely two-toned effect. The smooth, light grey trunk is quite striking, can grow to three or four feet in diameter, and it firmly supports the massively spreading canopy. Branches trained to remain less than half the diameter of the trunk are well-secured to the trunk.



Figure 1. *Ficus benjamina* 'Green Gem': 'Green Gem' Cuban-laurel.
Credits: Stephen Brown, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Ficus benjamina*

Pronunciation: FYE-kuss ben-jah-MEE-nah

Common name(s): 'Green Gem' Cuban-Laurel

Family: *Moraceae*

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

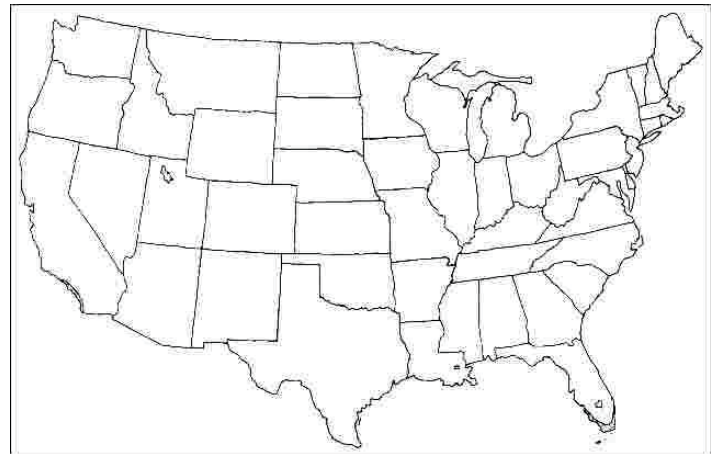


Figure 2. Range
Credits: UF/IFAS

1. This document is ENH415, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006 and March 2024. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering; Ryan W. Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture; and Deborah R. Hilbert, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Department of Environmental Horticulture; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Origin: not native to North America

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

Uses: indoors

Description

Height: 45 to 55 feet

Spread: 40 to 55 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: round, vase, spreading

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Foliage of *Ficus benjamina* 'Green Gem': 'Green Gem' Cuban-laurel.

Credits: Stephen Brown, UF/IFAS

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: unknown

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Unripe fruit of *Ficus benjamina* 'Green Gem': 'Green Gem' Cuban-laurel.

Credits: Stephen Brown, UF/IFAS

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: red

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

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches don't droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns

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, 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

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

Use and Management

Few aerial roots are produced making this a suitable street tree. Also used as a park tree, Cuban-Laurel tolerates trimming well and can be shaped and sheared into a hedge, screen, or barrier. It also makes a wonderful shade tree on large properties. Plant at least 10 feet from the curb or sidewalk so surface roots won't cause damage. The fruit stains cars and sidewalks and can be generally messy on paved and other hard surfaces. Importation of the wasp which pollinates the flowers may stimulate production of fertile fruit and this could allow the tree to become a pesty weed.

Growing easily in full sun or partial shade, Cuban-Laurel thrives on various well-drained soils and is moderately salt-tolerant.

Propagation is by cuttings or air layering.

Pests

Scales are a problem, but it is resistant to thrips.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.