Ficus aurea
Strangler Fig

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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 (Fig. 1). 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
Uses: Bonsai; suitable for growing indoors; reclamation plant; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 50 to 60 feet
Spread: 50 to 70 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; spreading
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; undulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-250, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
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**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy  

**Flower**  
**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy  

**Fruit**  
**Fruit shape:** oval; round  
**Fruit length:** < .5 inch  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** green; yellow  
**Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter  

**Trunk and Branches**  
**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; showy trunk; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns  
**Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure  
**Breakage:** resistant  
**Current year twig color:** green  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium  

**Culture**  
**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun  
**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; occasionally wet; alkaline; well-drained  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate  

**Other**  
**Roots:** surface roots can lift sidewalks or interfere with mowing  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding  
**Invasive potential:** seeds itself into the landscape  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests
Figure 3. Foliage of Strangler Fig.

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.