Ficus elastica ‘Variegata’
‘Variegata’ Rubber Tree

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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 (Fig. 1). 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 ‘Variegata’
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 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; espalier; suitable for growing indoors; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; trainable as a standard; shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

DESCRIPTION

Height: 30 to 45 feet
Spread: 25 to 30 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: oval

Figure 1. Young ‘Variegata’ Rubber Tree.

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-253, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: November 1993.
2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
Crown density: dense
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf evergreen;
evergreen
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: variegated
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit

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

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: thick
Propagation is by layering or cuttings.

**Pests and Diseases**

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

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**Culture**

*Light requirement:* tree grows in part shade/part sun; 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:* No entries found.  
*Pest resistance:* long-term health usually not affected by pests

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**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 center of leaf;