**Ficus retusa**
Cuban-Laurel

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

This rapidly-growing, rounded, broad-headed, evergreen tree (also known as *Ficus microcarpa*) can reach 50 feet or more in height with an equal spread (Fig. 1). The glossy, dark green, leathery leaves are densely clothed on large, somewhat weeping branches and are 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.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** *Ficus retusa*
- **Pronunciation:** FYE-kuss ree-TOO-suh
- **Common name(s):** Cuban-Laurel
- **Family:** Moraceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** suitable for growing indoors; not recommended for planting
- **Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**DESCRIPTION**

- **Height:** 50 to 60 feet
- **Spread:** 40 to 60 feet
- **Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms
- **Crown shape:** round; spreading; vase shape
- **Crown density:** dense
- **Growth rate:** fast
- **Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)
- **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 fall color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

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**Flower**

**Flower characteristics:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** round  
**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch; < .5 inch  
**Fruit covering:** fleshy  
**Fruit color:** red  
**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; grow mostly upright and will not droop; 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:** gray  
**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**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.  
**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**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 pesky weed.

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

The cultivar ‘Green Gem’ is resistant to thrips and is commonly available.

Propagation is by cuttings or air layerings.