Ficus rubiginosa
Rusty Fig

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

This broad, spreading evergreen tree is densely covered with oval, blunt-tipped, three to six-inch-long, medium green, smooth leaves, the undersides of which are brown and hairy (Fig. 1). One of the hardiest of the rubber trees, Rusty Fig makes an attractive specimen tree, especially when only a few major branches are allowed to develop creating a more open form. It does not develop the profusion of aerial roots which some others do. Rusty Fig’s dense growth habit and moderate growth rate make it better suited for smaller landscapes than most other Ficus trees. It grows to about 35 feet in 30-years. It is well-suited as a shade or street tree and should require little maintenance once initial pruning creates a good structural habit. Space major branches along the trunk and keep them trimmed so they remain less than half the diameter of the trunk. It is among the best ficus trees for frost-free climates.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Ficus rubiginosa
Pronunciation: FYE-kuss roo-bij-ih-NO-suh
Common name(s): Rusty Fig
Family: Moraceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; suitable for growing indoors; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree; tree has been successfully grown in urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil, and/or drought are common
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

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DESCRIPTION

Height: 35 to 50 feet  
Spread: 35 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  
Crown density: dense  
Growth rate: medium  
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: broadleaf evergreen; evergreen  
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round  
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch; < .5 inch  
Fruit covering: fleshy  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns  
Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure  
Breakage: resistant  
Current year twig color: brown; green  
Current year twig thickness: medium
Figure 3. Foliage of Rusty Fig.

Pests

Two problems are mites and scales.

Diseases

Rusty Fig is subject to root rot on poorly drained soils.

Culture

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

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Easily grown in full sun or partial shade, Rusty Fig will thrive on a variety of well-drained soils. Once established, it can withstand periods of drought and 30-degrees F. for a short time.

The cultivar ‘Variegata’ has leaves variegated with cream-yellow.

Propagation is by cuttings or air layers.