UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

ENH414

Ficus retusa: Cuban-Laurel[1]

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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. 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.



Figure 1. Mature *Ficus retusa*: Cuban-Laurel
Credits: Ed Gilman

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
Invasive potential: invasive non-native
Uses: indoors
Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 50 to 60 feet
Spread: 40 to 60 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: round, vase, spreading

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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 color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

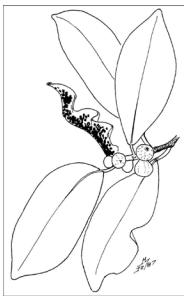


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: unknown
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch, .5 to 1 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: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained
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: resistant to pests/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.

The cultivar `Green Gem' is resistant to thrips and is commonly available.

Propagation is by cuttings or air layerings.

Pests

Scales and thrips are problems. Thrips often infest the foliage but will not kill the plant.

Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.