

Chinese banyan

Ficus microcarpa L f.

Mulberry family (Moraceae)

Post-Cook introduction

This large ornamental tree of the fig genus, planted in parks and gardens, is distinguished by its short trunk and very dense broad rounded crown, by small dark green elliptical leaves with very small figlike fruits paired at base, by numerous aerial roots about trunk or hanging hairlike from lower branches, and by the milky juice or white latex exuding from cuts.

Large evergreen introduced tree to 65 ft (20 m) high, the trunk to 3 ft (0.9 m) and often with buttresses at base, crown often broader than tall, hairless throughout. Bark smooth, gray. Inner bark whitish and tasteless but containing slightly bitter latex. Twigs slender, gray, ending in long-pointed green scale (stipule) $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm) or less in length, which forms bud and leaves ring scar at leaf base upon shedding.

Leaves alternate on leafstalks of $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (6–10 mm). Blades $1\frac{1}{2}$ –3 inches (4–7.5 cm) long and $\frac{5}{8}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (1.5–4 cm) wide, short-pointed at both ends and often nearly diamond-shaped (rhomboidal), with midvein and two main side veins from base along toothless margin, thick and leathery, upper surface dark green and slightly shiny, lower surface paler.

As flowers in this genus of figs are not visible, it appears that the trees have fruits but no flowers. The figlike multiple fruit (syconium), actually a compound fruit, corresponds to an enlarged overgrown flower stalk bearing on inner walls numerous tiny male and female flowers (monoecious) and the small seeds, each technically a fruit from a single flower. This species has small rounded figlike fruits paired and stalkless at leaf bases, about $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) in diameter, with tiny pointed opening at apex and three pointed scales (bracts) $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) long at base, green, turning yellow or reddish at maturity. Inside the fruit are many tiny male and female flowers (monoecious) and seeds. Fruiting probably through the year.

Sapwood whitish and heartwood light brown. Wood is moderately heavy (sp. gr. 0.50), marked by terminal parenchyma, with growth rings, soft and easy to work, very susceptible to attack by dry-wood termites.

This is a common species of the genus grown as an ornamental in lowlands of Hawaii. It has escaped from

cultivation and can be found occasionally in the forest. Near homes, it seeds prolifically in drain pipes and gutters where small deposits of silt permit rooting. Actually, only 469 trees of this species are reported as having been planted in the Forest Reserves. It does, however, serve as a representative of the genus, of which at least 33 other species have also been planted in the forests (about 60 spp. have been introduced). The three most common in the forests are Port Jackson fig, *Ficus rubiginosa* Desf. (40,000 trees planted), Moreton Bay fig, *Ficus macrophylla* Desf. (36,000 trees), and rough-leaf fig, *Ficus nota* Merr. (25,000 trees).

The dense crowns are frequently trimmed into rounded shapes. Rooting of cuttings is uncertain, but sometimes successful. Better results have been obtained by air layering or marcottage, in which a fairly large branch can be used. In some places this tree is considered objectionable because of its size, the litter of the numerous fruits, or because a thrips insect may deform the foliage and may irritate the eyes of persons beneath the tree.

Special area

Foster

Champion

Height 104 ft (31.7 m), c.b.h. 90.1 ft (27.5 m), spread 195 ft (59.4 m). Keaau Village, Puna, Hawaii (1968). This banyan with trunks and air roots grown together has the greatest trunk circumference and greatest crown spread of all Hawaiian champions.

Range

Native of India and Malaysia but widely planted in tropical regions.

Planted in southern Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and elsewhere in tropical America for ornament and shade. It is a popular tree of plazas or town squares.

Other common names

Malayan banyan, Indialaurel fig; laurel de la India (Spanish); jaguey (Puerto Rico); fig (Virgin Islands); nunu (N. Marianas); lulk (Palau)

Botanical synonym

Ficus nitida Thunb., not Blume. Formerly referred to as *F. retusa* L.



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Twig with fruits, 1 X (P.R. v. 1).