

# Finicky Ficus



Just about everyone that has ever purchased a Ficus Benjamina tree (commonly known as the weeping fig), has had to drag out the vacuum, broom, or even a rake to clean up those leaves that have dropped. All too often the concerned plant owner tries to water more, or water less, repot it, feed it, move it into more light, or move it into less light. Simply put, the plant just gets confused, and so do we.

So what's happening? The plant is adjusting to it's new environment. It's acclimating. Acclimating is normally a matter of going from high light to lower light. Just as we have certain expectations when we adopt an indoor plant, plants also have certain expectations of us. Understanding their native habitats can help us to satisfy those expectations. The Ficus family is quite diverse with over 800 species and 2,000 varieties. They can be found growing in full sun or the heavily shaded dense forest. Ficus is a very versatile plant as far as light goes. In the full sun, they will have a thick canopy of leaves. But, in the dense forest, they will grow very open with fewer leaves and thin weeping branches. This explains some of the leaf loss when your ficus goes from higher light levels (typically our greenhouse) to a lower light level (your home). They are adapting (acclimating).

## Water

Just as sure as birds migrate south for the winter season, the ficus benjamina comes from an area of the world that has always had a very distinct wet and dry season. When preparing for the dry season (the time when you thought someone else was watering your ficus), they shed their leaves, thus reducing the amount of leaves needed to survive, since a decrease in water will not support all of them. When the rains return (the first time you water after you notice all the leaves on the floor), new growth will emerge and the canopy will return. Although your indoor environment changes with the seasons, develop a watering schedule. The soil should be kept moist but not soggy and should not dry out between waterings.

## Light

Ficus do not like changes, they are truly creatures of habit. What they want, as much as anything else, is a consistent environment. Once you have decided where you are going to place your ficus (the more light the better), try to keep it in the same location. In addition, ficus enjoy warm conditions between 68-85 during the day.

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## Fertilizer

When grown indoors, ficus have almost no need to be fertilized. However, any well balanced fertilizer will maintain growth during spring and summer.

## Repotting

One of the first keys to having success with your plants indoors is maintaining a good root system. Do not make the mistake of repotting your new plant for at least several months. This would disturb the root system and change the amount of moisture around the roots. However, when the time does come to repot, as with most tropicals, ficus will flourish in almost any well drained potting soil.

## Leaf Care

Do clean the leaves to remove dust on a regular basis. You should take your ficus to the shower about every two months, or if you prefer to shower alone, a damp cloth will do.

Keep in mind that your ficus tree has been shipped from our Florida growers to our greenhouses and then to your home. The plant is experiencing both light changes and moisture changes. Moisture-stressed ficuses tend to drop yellow leaves, while ficuses exposed to low-light stress tend to drop green leaves.

