

Ficus aurea

[Synonyms : *Ficus aurea* subsp. *latifolia*, *Ficus jimenezii*, *Ficus lundellii*, *Ficus tecolutensis*, *Ficus tuerckheimii*]

FLORIDA STRANGLER FIG is a semi-evergreen shrub, vine or tree. Native to the south-eastern United States and the Caribbean, it has small sticky, orange-yellow fruit (receptacles).

It is also known as Golden fig, *Higuera dorada* (Spanish), and Strangler fig.

The tree often begins life as an air plant (epiphyte) and strangler vine. Its seed is deposited on a leaf in the canopy of a ‘host’ tree (such as in the Everglades swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), or oak trees (*Quercus*) or palms). This sprouts and sends out aerial roots that drop down around the ‘host’ tree and the ‘cuckoo’ air plant becomes supported by its strangling aerial roots – by which time the crown of the ‘host’ tree is being smothered and blocked from light. This kills the ‘host’ and the strangler survives in its place supported by roots which are now digging into the ground.

Aurea means ‘golden’.

The North American Seminole Indians obtained a chewing gum from the plant.

The wood was used by Seminole Indians to make arrows, and its root bark supplied binding material, as well as strong lashing material for a wide range of applications from construction work (such as houses or cane mills) to fishing lines and bow strings.

The bark was used by the Seminole tribe in poultices applied to sores and cuts.

Today in Florida many inhabitants view this fig with horror. It will sprout happily in crevices and cracks on old buildings no less than trees and its huge roots have been known to buckle concrete pavements and swimming pools and, perhaps more seriously, penetrate sewerage and drainage systems.