

Ficus benjamina

[Synonyms : *Ficus benyamina*, *Ficus nitida*, *Ficus retusa*, *Urostigma benjaminum*]

WEeping FIG is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native from India to Malaysia it has very small purplish-black fruit (receptacle).

It is also known as *Árbol benjamín* (Spanish), *Bai rong* (Chinese), *Balete* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Banjano* (Esperanto), *Banyan tree*, *Bendžamin* (Serbian), *Benjamina* (Swedish), *Benjaminificus* (Swedish), *Benjamin fig*, *Benjamin-Gummibaum* (German), *Benjamin tree*, *Beringin* (Indonesian, Malay), *Birkefigen* (Danish), *Birkenfeige* (German), *Caringin* (Sundanese), *Cây sanh* (Vietnamese), *Ceylon willow*, *Charingin* (Sundanese), *Chinese banyan*, *Chui ye rong* (Chinese), *Conkar* (Nepalese), *Ficus* (Dutch, French), *Ficus benyamina* (Swedish), *Fikus benjamina* (Serbian), *Golden fig*, *Java ficus*, *Java fig*, *Java willow*, *Kelat sega* (Malay), *Kleinbladige waringin* (Dutch), *Kyet kadut* (Burmese), *Mandara* (Sanskrit), *Matapalo* (Spanish), *Mata palo extranjero* (Spanish), *Mendera* (Malay), *Nyaung lun* (Burmese), *Nyaung thabye* (Burmese), *Pakur* (Bengali), *Sai-yoi* (Thai), *Sai-yoi-bai-laem* (Thai), *Salisi* (Italian), *Samii* (Nepalese), *Sanh* (Vietnamese), *Shidare gajumarū* (Japanese), *Small-leaved rubber plant*, *Svaamii* (Nepalese), *Tropic laurel*, *Vellal* (Tamil), *Waringin* (English, German, Javanese), *Waringin* (Javanese, Malay, Sumatran), *Weeping chinese banyan*, *Weeping chinese fig*, and *Weeping laurel*.

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. This sprouts and sends out aerial roots that drop down around the 'host' tree. 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.

Benjamina is derived from an Indian name *benjan*.

It has long been traditional practice in Malaysia to plant a pair of these trees before a royal building – and two were grown in front of Government House in Singapore.

Today it is still cultivated as an ornamental plant (not least for its drooping branches) throughout south-eastern Asia – as well as in Egypt where it can be seen along avenues and streets where it also offers shade. It has served as a house plant too.

Strips of the fibrous bark were used to make rope but this had one particular drawback. It lost much of its strength when wet.

American research at NASA at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries has identified useful air purification qualities in weeping fig. Apparently it is believed to be able to dissipate formaldehyde present in interior environments.

Birds enjoy the fruit.

Some authorities note that weeping fig seems to be primarily of ornamental importance in south-eastern Asia and that any medicinal, timber, fibre, tanning or latex attributes come second.

Medicinally, a leaf decoction in oil is applied to ulcers in Indian medicine.