10

COLLECTOR GUIDE

The Fiddle-Leaf Fig Guide

Ficus lyrata

How to use this guide

The weight of the pot. The angle of the leaves. The depth of the dry layer. The position of a new bud. Good care begins by noticing what changed before deciding what to do.

THE ONE-CHANGE RULE

Change one condition. Record what happened. Give the plant time to answer.

Contents

PLANT IDENTITY	
BOTANICAL	*Ficus lyrata*
FAMILY	Moraceae
ORIGIN	Tropical western and central Africa
HABIT	Woody broadleaf evergreen tree

SECTION	PAGE
Plant profile	04
Care at a glance	05
Light	07
Placement	07
Watering	08
Humidity and temperature	09
Soil and fertilizer	10
Fiddle-Leaf Fig anatomy	11

SECTION	PAGE
Leaf care and pruning	12
Troubleshooting	13
Repotting	14
Propagation	15
Seasonal care	16
Pet safety	17
Observation log	18

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start with the condition you can observe. Avoid making several changes at once. The printable log at the end is part of the care system, not an afterthought.

Plant profile

Ficus lyrata is a woody tropical tree with large, leathery, lyre-shaped leaves. Indoors, it is valued for its upright structure and coarse, sculptural foliage.

Care at a glance

Bright filtered light, a stable position, free drainage, and attentive watering. Consistency matters more than a rigid routine.

LIGHT

Give it bright indirect or curtain-filtered light. Introduce stronger sun gradually to avoid leaf scorch.

WATER

Water when the upper roughly 2 inches have dried and the pot feels lighter. Wet the mix thoroughly, then let all excess drain.

HUMIDITY

Moderate humidity supports the broad leaves, but stable air and correct watering matter more than routine misting.

WARMTH

Keep it warm and away from cold drafts, hot vents, and abrupt temperature changes around windows or doors.

SOIL

Use a well-drained houseplant mix with fine bark or small perlite in a stable pot with an unobstructed drainage hole.

UPKEEP

Rotate gradually, wipe dust with a soft damp cloth, and inspect leaf undersides and stems for scale, mites, or mealybugs.

THE RELIABLE DEFAULT

Choose a bright stable place. Check below the surface before watering, then drain completely and empty the saucer.

Light

Window direction is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, season, curtains, and distance all change the light that reaches a leaf.

TOO INTENSE

Bleached or tan patches on the window-facing surface after abrupt exposure to stronger sun.

USEFUL RANGE

Bright filtered daylight supports full-sized leaves, sturdy growth, and shorter gaps along the stem.

TOO DIM

Smaller new leaves, longer stem gaps, pronounced leaning, or stalled growth during the active season.

ADJUST SLOWLY

Move the plant in stages. Sudden changes can burn or stress established leaves.

> **TURN WITH INTENTION**
>
> A tall canopy can become strongly one-sided. Rotate only a small amount at a time, then leave the plant in place long enough to acclimate.

Placement

Choose a bright position where the large leaves have room and the trunk will not be brushed repeatedly. Keep it clear of drafts and heating vents, and avoid frequent moves.

Watering

The calendar should remind you to inspect the pot, not instruct you to pour.

After the upper roughly 2 inches have dried, water the full root zone and let excess leave through the drainage holes.

01

CHECK THE MIX

Feel about 2 inches below the surface and compare the pot's weight. If the upper mix is still moist, wait.

02

WATER EVENLY

When the upper layer is dry, wet the root zone evenly until water exits the drainage holes.

03

LET IT FINISH

Let the pot drain completely, then empty the saucer or decorative outer pot.

Humidity and temperature

Moderate humidity supports the broad leaves. Stable air, correct watering, and protection from drafts matter more than repeated misting.

WARM ROOMS	Keep the plant above 55°F and away from cold glass, hot vents, and abrupt temperature swings.
HUMIDITY	Moderate humidity is useful. A room humidifier is more reliable than repeatedly wetting the foliage.
WINTER	Shorter days slow growth and water use. Check the mix rather than maintaining the same summer watering interval.

SEPARATE AIR FROM SOIL

Humidity does not replace watering, and moist air does not justify saturated soil.

Soil and fertilizer

The mix sits below the rim around the stem, leaving room to water.

POTTING MIX

Choose a well-drained houseplant mix amended with fine bark or small perlite. Avoid dense garden soil, oversized pots, and sealed containers.

FERTILIZER

Feed during active spring and summer growth using a general houseplant fertilizer at or below the labeled rate. Pause when growth slows.

Fiddle-Leaf Fig anatomy

Numbered markers correspond to the definitions at right.

1 LEAF BLADE

A large, leathery blade with the narrowed middle that creates its lyre-like outline.

2 MIDRIB AND VEINS

A strong central midrib with prominent lateral veins supporting the textured blade.

3 UNDULATE MARGIN

The gently wavy, unlobed edge of a mature leaf.

4 PETIOLE

The sturdy stalk joining each leaf blade to the woody stem.

5 NODE

The stem point where a leaf, bud, or branch can develop.

6 NEW BUD

A developing leaf protected by a reddish-brown stipule before it unfurls.

Leaf care and pruning

READ THE WHOLE CANOPY

One angled or cupped leaf is weak evidence. Look for a repeated pattern across old and new growth.

CLEAN GENTLY

Support each petiole while wiping the leaf with a barely damp cloth. Avoid leaf polish and hard rubbing.

PRUNE DELIBERATELY

Remove a failed leaf by cutting its petiole cleanly near the stem. Structural pruning is best timed to active growth.

WATCH NEW BUDS

Judge recovery by healthy new growth. Existing scars and brown tissue will not turn green again.

> **EXPECT MILKY SAP**
>
> A cut stem or petiole releases latex sap that may irritate skin. Wear gloves, protect surfaces, and clean tools afterward.

Troubleshooting

Check the pattern, the root zone, and the recent change before reaching for a remedy.

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT TO INSPECT	FIRST RESPONSE
Lower leaf drop	Watering extremes, chilling, root stress, or a recent move.	Check the recent change and root-zone moisture before adjusting care.
Bleached or crisp patches	Strong direct sun, hot glass, or a rapid move into brighter light.	Filter the strongest light and judge recovery by undamaged new leaves.
Brown leaf spots	Lesion pattern, wet or dry mix, sun exposure, temperature shifts, roots, and nearby affected leaves.	Isolate if disease is plausible. Correct the confirmed condition rather than diagnosing from color alone.
Small leaves or long gaps	Insufficient light, one-sided exposure, depleted nutrition, or a seasonal slowdown.	Improve filtered light gradually and evaluate only the next flush of growth.
Speckling or pests	Leaf undersides and stems for mites, cottony material, thrips, webbing, or fixed bumps.	Separate the plant, confirm the pest, and follow a labeled treatment.

DO NOT STACK REMEDIES

Extra water, fertilizer, repotting, homemade pesticide, and a new location applied together can increase stress and erase the evidence. Change one condition at a time unless roots are actively failing.

Repotting

Healthy roots are firm and pale to tan; soft, dark, or foul-smelling tissue requires closer inspection.

01

PREPARE

Choose a draining pot one size larger and prepare fresh mix.

02

INSPECT

Look before teasing. Healthy roots are firm and pale or tan rather than soft, dark, and foul-smelling.

03

SET

Keep the trunk at its former depth. Do not bury the woody stem to correct a lean.

04

SETTLE

Backfill gently, water to settle the mix, then let the pot drain completely.

WHEN TO ACT

Repot when roots are crowded, the plant becomes unstable, or the mix no longer drains normally. Choose a heavy pot only slightly wider than the root mass.

Propagation

A complete new tree needs a stem cutting with at least one viable node. A detached leaf may root, but it cannot develop a new stem without node tissue.

The cutting includes a section of stem, a clear node, and a modest new root system.

01

CHOOSE

Choose healthy non-flowering growth and include a section of stem with at least one node.

02

PREPARE

Use a clean tool. Reduce oversized leaves if needed to limit moisture loss, but keep the node intact.

03

ROOT

Place the node in a clean, airy rooting medium or water while keeping the leaf blades above the surface.

04

POT UP

Move a rooted cutting into a small draining pot and keep it in bright filtered light while it establishes.

> **ANOTHER ROUTE**
>
> Air layering can root a stem while it remains attached to the parent. It is useful for a tall bare stem but requires careful moisture control.

Seasonal care

Indoor seasons are shaped by daylight, heating, cooling, and windows. The plant's pace remains the primary signal.

OBSERVE	SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
LIGHT	Increase filtered light gradually.	Filter harsh midday sun.	Watch shorter days.	Use the brightest safe place.
WATER	Growth and drying may accelerate.	Recheck the upper mix often.	Intervals may widen.	Confirm dryness first.
FEED	Begin with growth.	Continue at label rate.	Reduce as growth slows.	Pause if inactive.
PROJECTS	Repot, prune, or take stem cuttings.	Inspect stems, leaf undersides, and drainage.	Clean leaves and review new growth.	Protect from cold glass.

THE USEFUL SCHEDULE

Schedule observations. Let the observations determine the care.

Pet safety

Ficus lyrata is mildly toxic to dogs and cats. Chewed plant material can cause gastrointestinal irritation, and the milky sap may irritate skin.

PRACTICAL PRECAUTIONS

Place the large plant where pets cannot chew the leaves or overturn its heavy container.

Collect fallen leaves, pruned stems, fertilizer, and potting debris promptly.

Wear gloves when pruning and keep pets away from fresh cuts and milky sap.

Keep fertilizers, pesticides, and potting materials secured.

WHAT TO DO

Possible signs after chewing include vomiting or diarrhea. Contact a veterinarian or animal poison service if exposure occurs or symptoms develop.

ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL

(888) 426-4435

A consultation fee may apply.

This guidance applies to correctly identified *Ficus lyrata*. Keep the botanical name available when seeking veterinary advice.

Observation log: before a change

Use one page for one care decision. Print extra copies of pages 18-19 whenever you need them.

PLANT NAME OR IDENTIFYING NOTE

DATE

LOCATION AND WINDOW DIRECTION

WHAT I OBSERVED

POTTING MIX BEFORE WATERING

☐ Wet ☐ Moist ☐ Dry at surface ☐ Dry deeper ☐ Not checked

ONE ACTION I TOOK

Observation log: follow-up

Return after enough time has passed to notice a meaningful response. Avoid adding a second change too quickly.

FOLLOW-UP DATE

DAYS SINCE THE CHANGE

WHAT CHANGED NEXT

WHAT STAYED THE SAME

MY NEXT OBSERVATION DATE AND WHY

☐ Continue ☐ Reassess ☐ Seek expert help ☐ No further action

Continue observing

Keep the guide. Reprint the log. Let observation become the routine.