

The Rubber Plant Guide

Ficus elastica



How to use this guide

The weight of the pot. The angle of the upper leaves. The depth of the dry layer. The position of the red stipule. 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	<i>Ficus elastica</i>
FAMILY	Moraceae
ORIGIN	Southeast Asia, Nepal to China and western Malesia
HABIT	Broadleaf evergreen tree

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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 elastica is a broadleaf evergreen tree with large, stiff, glossy elliptical leaves. Indoors, it forms an upright architectural specimen with conspicuous red new-growth stipules.

Care at a glance

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

LIGHT

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

WATER

Water when the upper inch or two has 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 and 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 medium to bright filtered 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

Medium to bright filtered daylight supports large leaves, sturdy stems, and balanced upright growth.

TOO DIM

Smaller new leaves, wider 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

The large leaves can turn strongly toward a window. Rotate only a small amount at a time, then leave the plant long enough to acclimate.



Placement

Choose a filtered position where the broad leaves have room and the stem will not be brushed repeatedly. Keep it clear of cold glass, drafts, and heating vents.

Watering

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



A little runoff shows the root zone has been watered; empty the saucer after the pot finishes draining.

01

CHECK THE MIX

Feel an inch or two 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 suits 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



Leave a gap below the rim so the mix can be watered without spilling over.

POTTING MIX

Choose a well-drained houseplant mix amended with fine bark and 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.

Rubber Plant anatomy



Numbered markers correspond to the definitions at right.

① LEAF BLADE

A large, stiff, leathery elliptical blade with an entire margin and a short pointed tip.

② RAISED MIDRIB

The strong central rib, often pale or reddish and conspicuously raised beneath.

③ PALER UNDERSIDE

The lower leaf surface, lighter than the glossy deep-green upper surface.

④ PETIOLE

The short sturdy stalk joining each leaf blade to the main stem.

⑤ NODE

The stem point where a leaf and bud develop; fallen leaves leave a visible scar.

⑥ RED STIPULE

The red or burgundy sheath enclosing a new leaf before drying and falling away.

Leaf care and pruning



READ THE WHOLE CANOPY

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

CLEAN GENTLY

Wipe each leaf gently with a barely damp soft cloth. Avoid oils, 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 sticky 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 yellowing or drop	Leaf age, 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 edges or patches	Dry air, watering swings, salts, sun exposure, lesion pattern, and root condition.	Isolate if disease is plausible. Correct the confirmed condition rather than diagnosing from color alone.
Small leaves or wider 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, webbing, or fixed scale 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 stable pot only slightly wider than the root mass.

Propagation

Air layering roots a stem while it remains attached to the plant. It is useful for shortening a tall specimen while preserving a leafy top.



The enclosed medium surrounds a stem section below a node while the leafy top remains attached.

01

CHOOSE

Choose a healthy straight stem and decide where the rooted top will eventually be removed.

02

PREPARE

With a clean tool, make the recommended wound below a node while protecting skin and surfaces from sap.

03

ROOT

Wrap moist sphagnum around the wounded section and enclose it securely without covering leaves.

04

POT UP

When roots are visible through the medium, cut below the layer and pot the rooted top in draining mix.

STEM CUTTINGS

Stem cuttings are also possible. Include viable node tissue, allow the fresh cut to callus briefly, and root it in a clean airy medium.

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 elastica is toxic to dogs and cats. Its sap and chewed tissue may cause oral irritation and minor gastrointestinal distress.

PRACTICAL PRECAUTIONS

Place the plant where pets cannot chew the leaves or overturn its 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 include oral irritation, drooling, retching, or vomiting. 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 elastica*. 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.