

## Golden Gate Ficus from BonsaiOutlet.com

### General Background:

There are over 600 species of Ficus, most of them tropical and evergreen. Ficus produces a unique "fruit" which is actually an inverted flower. Ficus is one of the most loved bonsai for many reasons. It is an excellent tree for beginners, as most species of Ficus are fast growers, tolerant of most any soil and light conditions, make fine indoor bonsai, and perhaps most importantly, are remarkably forgiving of those just learning bonsai watering techniques.

### Trees Features:

Ficus are one of the best varieties of Bonsai trees for indoors. They're very easy to take care of and need little attention. In the ficus family, the Golden Gate variety is the best for growing indoors. The attractive gray trunk is thick and sturdy topped by small, dark green oval foliage.

### Temperature:

Ficus bonsai do not like drafts making it important to avoid putting your Bonsai near a draft or vent, which dries out the foliage. Grafted Ficus trees are a warm weather loving plant and should come inside when the temperatures drop to the low 50's. Variations in temperature will increase leaf dropping.

### Lighting:

Ficus trees will grow in low light but thrive in high light. Make sure not to expose your Ficus to direct afternoon sun in the summer. Ficus trees are great inside but appreciate being taken outside in the summer. As with any bonsai giving Ficus the maximum amount of light will help to keep them healthy and strong. Growing in dim light will result in leggy, weak, off color growth and disease prone plants, but of the Ficus varieties, The Golden Gate Ficus is most tolerant for growing in lower light conditions; that being said, low light does not mean poor light. When Ficus are grown indoors give them the most window light possible or augment with artificial light for 18 hours a day.

**Watering:**

Keep your Ficus moderately wet; water your tree well in the summer and decrease watering in the winter letting it dry before watering again. Ficus are very tolerant of being over or under watered, which makes them ideal for beginners. A humidity tray is a great way to increase humidity. These shallow trays are filled with small stones and have water in the bottom of the tray. Make sure the water does not reach the bottom of the Bonsai pot to prevent root rot. As the water evaporates, it creates an appropriate level of humidity mimicking the Ficus Bonsai's natural environment

**Fertilizing:**

Fertilize your Ficus Bonsai Every two weeks during the growing season and decrease in the winter. Make sure to fertilize only after a thorough watering of the soil. Reduce fertilization to once a month during the winter months when growth slows or stops. Ficus trees will respond almost immediately to fertilizing with beautiful new growth.

**Pruning / Training:**

Leaf pruning can be used to reduce leaf size. Prune back to 2-4 leaves after 6-10 leaves have grown. ; A total defoliation can be performed at the end of spring on healthy specimens. Watch out, a Ficus will bleed a milky latex profusely when it's pruned (They're in the rubber tree family). It can be messy but when the latex dries, it forms its own natural seal. Shape will be determined by the overall look that you want to achieve. Sit at eye level with your Bonsai tree and use Bonsai trimming shears. Allow shoots to extend 3 or 4 nodes then prune back to 1 or 2 leaves as required. Your cuts should be smooth or slightly concave so the wound will heal quickly. If the cut surface is brown, add pruning paint to the surface.

Pruning can be done anytime but, late summer and autumn pruning will reduce scarring. Wiring and moving branches is most easily done when branches are less than ½ inch thick. Since branches can grow quickly wire cutting and scarring can occur rapidly. Watch any wired tree and remove wire before it cuts into the bark. Wait until the branches have lignified slightly to wire. The Golden Gate Ficus is perfectly suited to the classical Umbrella style which allows showcasing of the attractive gray variations in the bark of the Bonsai but is attractive in virtually any style you choose.

**Insects / Pests:**

Keep leaves free from dust and inspect regularly for pests or fungus. Taking good care of your bonsai's hygiene will go a long way in preventing insects and diseases. Ficus pests are mainly scale, mites and mealy bugs. Yellow leaves, sticky leaves, off color leaves and/or spider webs indicate insect problems. Most types of insect infestations can be controlled with a harmless solution of 1 tsp dish soap to 1 quart lukewarm water; Spray the entire plant down with mixture to create run-off, repeat as needed.

**Propagation:**

Summer is the best time to take cuttings; with sharp clean scissors, take a four inch cutting with about the width of your little finger from a supple branch on a healthy mother plant and dip the cutting in a good quality rooting powder. Plant it in sharp river sand in a pot that measures 4 inches in height. After a month, carefully tip the cutting out of the pot. You should see root growth. At this point, cut off all of the leaves except for the tip at the top of the cutting. Replant in the same pot using the same sharp river sand and keep it in the shade for two weeks. After two weeks, start feeding a liquid seaweed fertilizer and two weeks after that begin feeding a fertilizer suitable for hydroponic for the next three months. After three months, removing the cutting from sand should indicate a healthy development of fibrous roots ready to be planted.

**Repotting:**

The Golden Gate Ficus will need to be transplanted every two to three years at the beginning of the spring before the growing season has begun. Take care not to over prune the roots of your bonsai taking no more than 10 % of the root growth away.

**Additional Comments:**

Ficus are very sensitive to movement and change in lighting and will protest being moved by dropping their leaves, so be sure to find a bright location away from drafts and keep it there to maintain optimum bonsai health.

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