

Ficus benjamina

Moraceae

India, Malaysia, Indonesia

COMMON NAMES: English: Java fig, Benjamin's fig.**DESCRIPTION:** A dense evergreen tree 10–20 m with ascending branches but **drooping foliage on slender branchlets**. **BARK:** Grey–white–green. **LEAVES:** Small and thin, lime green when young, later **leathery, shiny dark green**, narrow oval, 8–10 cm long with a **pointed 'drip tip'**, base rounded. **FIGS:** Beside leaves, **very many**, often in pairs, each **about 1 cm across**, turning from **orange to dark red**, attracting birds.**ECOLOGY:** A native of Asia distributed from India to northern Australia. Thrives best in a humid climate. Can be grown in pots as an indoor plant. Widely planted as an ornamental in Kenya, particularly as an avenue tree. It needs humid conditions to grow well. The roots may damage foundations and sewerage systems if planted too close to buildings. Agroclimatic Zones II–IV.**USES:** Firewood, shade, ornamental, avenue tree.**PROPAGATION:** By air layering. Nairobi tree nurserymen occasionally grow the tree from short cuttings obtained from branch ends. This is done during cold seasons when the rate of evaporation is low. In hot seasons the cuttings tend to dry.**MANAGEMENT:** Fast growing; pollarding. Avoid planting too near buildings or in cropland.**REMARKS:** This tree responds well to pollarding. Best planted as individual trees rather than as a stand. Suppresses undergrowth, so should not be planted near crops. There are several attractive varieties. It is a common tree in Nairobi.**FURTHER READING:** Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Noad and Birnie, 1989.