



Small-Leaved Fig



The Rainforest Strangler

Ficus obliqua begins life as a seedling. The animals that eat the figs disperse the seeds, which then germinate and grow on other plants (epiphytes) or on rocks (lithophytes).

As the new plants develop, they grow their roots downward to the forest floor and envelop the host tree while also growing upward to reach into the sunlight zone above the canopy.

This growth habit is an adaptation for growing in dark forests where the competition for light is intense.

The fig grows larger and larger eventually strangling the host tree.

This original support tree can sometimes die, so that the strangler fig becomes a "columnar tree" with a hollow central core.

Propagation and cultivation

It is pollinated by two species of fig wasp — *Pleistodontes greenwoodi* and *P. xanthocephalus*.

Family: *Moraceae*

Genus: *Ficus*

Botanic name: *Ficus obliqua* previously known as *Ficus eugenioides*
From the Latin adjective *obliquus*, meaning "oblique", possibly referring to the shape of the leaves; described by German naturalist Georg Forster in 1786 based on the type of material collected in Vanuatu

Also known as: Small-Leaved Fig, *baka* in Fijian

Origin: Native to eastern Australia, New Guinea, eastern Indonesia to Sulawesi and islands in the southwestern Pacific Ocean

Habitat: Rainforest, savanna woodland, sclerophyll forest and gallery forest along the east coast from Queensland, through New South Wales. Chiefly in coastal areas and adjacent ranges west to the Liverpool Range.

Description: *F. obliqua* is a strangling tree with a massive buttressed trunk consisting of coalesced roots. It can grow up to 50-60m high with a canopy almost as wide. The bark is pale grey or brownish with small nodules (lenticels) and ridges.

The glossy green leaves are small for a strangler fig, leading to its common name. They are ovate, elliptic, oblong or oblique, 3-13cm long, 1.5-6cm wide, moderately thick, glabrous; venation visible on both surfaces, but raised and more prominent below.



Growing in pairs, the small round yellow fruit, 6-10mm in diameter, ripen and turn orange or orange-red dotted with darker red at any time of year, although ripening peaks in autumn and winter (April to July).

The tree is *monoecious* — both male and female flowers are produced by the same plant, and in fact in the same fruit — and the fruit is a *syconium*, meaning it is an inverted *inflorescence* with the flowers lining an internal cavity of the fruit.

Uses:

All parts of the tree have been used in traditional medicine in Fiji, the tree previously held to be sacred there. Its white sap has been used for painful or swollen joints and limbs or boils, or diluted with water and drunk to improve breast milk. Liquid extracted from the root bark has been used for headaches or, when diluted, to improve health after childbirth.

Many species of birds, including pigeons, parrots and various passerines, as well as the Flying Fox eat the fruit while leaves serve as a food source for the larvae of the butterfly species the common crow (*Euploea core*) and the no-brand crow (*Euploea alcatheae*).

It is used as a shade tree in parks and public spaces, and is well-suited for use as an indoor plant or in bonsai. *Ficus obliqua* is long-lived, and trees are thought to live in excess of 500 years.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficus_obliqua

<https://www.botanybrisbane.com/plants/moraceae/ficus/ficus-obliqua/>

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