

Collectors Corner Fact Sheet

Pot Belly Figs (*Ficus microcarpa retusa*)



70 year old specimen

The 'Pot Belly Fig' or Banyan Fig is a very hardy go anywhere plant that will suit a wide range of conditions from cold southern climates to the extreme tropics, from outdoors in full exposure to any well lit indoor position, Ficus are noted as one of the hardiest of all indoor plants. Pot Belly Figs are found throughout South East Asia and are also called 'The Banyan Fig', movies like Tomb Raider show the plant growing over ancient ruins.

Where can I keep my Pot Belly Fig.

Figs are very hardy and will tolerate full sun to almost total shade, indoors they will do well in any well lit position and can be kept without natural sunlight for up to a month. Ficus can tolerate minor frosts, if heavy frosts are predicted move plants under cover if grown in the open, frost will only damage the outer leaves and the thinner stems, the plant will recover in spring if this occurs. If moved around the plant may loose some leaves, this is not a problem and will soon stop once the plant has adjusted to the environment.

Why does the plant have a pot belly.

This fig species quickly forms a strong and thick tap root which can swell rapidly, this allows young plants if trapped in rocky areas to break the rocks or grow across the rocks to seek new areas to find soil, the thick roots also allow the plant to dry out for short periods without suffering, even if the leaves drop the plant will recover.

Growing you Pot Belly Fig

- Figs prefer regular moisture and but can dry out for a very short time, once leaves droop water immediately. Soil should be moist or almost dry and not wet before rewatering. Outdoors in hot sunny positions watering may be required daily whereas indoors in cool positions once a week may be enough. Water well so that the soil becomes thoroughly moist, do not allow the plant to sit in water for excessive periods.
- Feeding is essential for growth, if you prefer the plant to stay small and the leaves reduce in size then feed very little or none at all, for good growth use a general plant food at the recommended rate for outdoor plants and at quarter strength for indoor plants.
- Figs make great pot plants, they can also grow into trees that may not fit into a pot, your plant will continue to grow for the next 500 years until it is a monster, or



if you don't have the room then regular trimmings can keep it as tall or as small as you want. Stems can grow 10 to 30cm per year, these can be cut as often as required to any length or removed completely. The plant on the left is an untrained specimen that has been cut back many times, the plant on the first page has been deliberately trained to allow only certain branches to grow, the rest are removed. With time figs can be trained into incredible specimens that can be kept as a miniature for hundreds of years.

Pot Belly Figs also come in a grafted form with the graft being a round leaved fig that has much tighter and more compact growth, this form can be grown 2 or 3 years without training or cutting back.

- Repotting is only required for cosmetic reasons or to speed up growth, after a few years the pot will become a mass of roots and have no room for new root growth, this will slow down growth, in some cases this is beneficial. Repotting can be into any good potting mix that suits the environment that the plant will be grown in, not the plant itself. Roots can be cut savagely or not at all, plant can also be raised higher to expose more roots.
- Pot Belly's can be grown on rocks and will wrap around the rock eventually, there are many interesting ways to grow pot bellies. A popular way is to raise the plant a few inches every year, this way the roots can create weird and wonderful shapes.

Pot Belly Figs can be kept for life, in china there are collectors who only collect Pot Belly Figs and have amazing collections. The most valuable are the ones that take on human shapes, the figs are also call Ginseng Figs as the roots closely resemble the human like roots of the Mandrake , famous the Ginseng plant of Korea

Good Growing!

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2 year old ungrafted Ficus



Grafted Ficus