Climbing Fig

Climbing fig (*Ficus pumila*) is a woody, evergreen vine that can be used outdoors to cover a wall or fence, or as an indoor ornamental, where it is allowed to either cascade down from a hanging basket, or trained to cover a trellis, hoop or pole. Typically, only the juvenile foliage of climbing fig is present, which is small (1-inch long and ½- to ¾-inch wide), light green and slightly pleated. Climbing fig, sometimes called creeping fig, is an Eastern Asian species and a member of the mulberry family (Moraceae).

The vines adhere to surfaces by aerial rootlets which cling tightly to wood, stucco, brick or tree bark. Some surfaces may be damaged by the removal of the vines, especially wood and stucco. In the juvenile state, the vines lay close to the surface and a mat of foliage eventually covers the surface entirely. The rate of growth is approximately 9 to 12 inches per year. Once the upper limit of the structure has been reached, climbing fig branches start to grow outward and horizontally, and on these branches it produces the larger, mature foliage. This foliage is darker green, shiny, leathery, and up to 3 inches long by 2 inches wide.
Mature branches may flower and set fruit, which are pale green and about 3 inches long and 2 inches wide. Fruit are uncommon and probably are inedible.

Climbing fig is hardy in South Carolina from USDA cold hardiness zones 8 to 11, but may be severely damaged at temperatures below 15 °F. Initially the outermost foliage is burned by cold temperatures. Prolonged, extreme cold may kill the vine.

If climbing fig (Ficus pumila) is exposed to temperatures in the low to mid-20’s, the outermost foliage is damaged. Joey Williamson, ©2013 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Climbing fig grows best in a site with part-shade or filtered light, but will still grow well in full shade. Younger plants require irrigation when the soil becomes dry, but once well-established, climbing fig is a very drought tolerant vine.

Cultivars
- ‘Snowflake’ is a variegated form with wide, white margins on the foliage.
- ‘Minima’ has very small leaves and may make for a better indoor plant in a container or hanging basket.
- ‘Quercifolia’ also has small foliage, which is lobed and look like miniature oak leaves.
- ‘Sunny Fig’ is a variegated form with white margins, and these white areas tend to grow outward beyond the normal leaf margin.

Propagation
Climbing fig can be easily propagated using 4-inch terminal cuttings taken between June and September. Remove the lower leaves from each cutting and treat the cut ends with a rooting powder or liquid. A rooting hormone containing IBA stimulates root formation best. Examples of powdered products containing IBA are Green Light Rooting Hormone, Schultz Take Root, Miracle Grow Fast Root Rooting Hormone, Ferti-lome Rooting Powder, Garden Tech Root Boost, and Garden Safe Take Root Rooting Hormone.

Fill new or cleaned 3- or 4-inch containers with a well-drained medium made of a 1:1 mix of perlite and potting soil. Stick 4 to 6 treated cuttings into each container, water to settle the soil mix, and cover the containers with clear plastic bags to keep relative humidity high. Place pots in a warm site with bright indirect light. Rooting should be 90 to 100% in 2 or 3 months.
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