Rubber Plant

Rubber plants (*Ficus elastica*) are easy to grow and care for and do well in a variety of conditions. They are excellent plants for beginners.

**Height/Spread**
Rubber plants can easily grow 6 to 10 feet tall or more indoors if there is enough space. They can be pruned to reduce their size.

**Ornamental Features**
Rubber plants are grown for their glossy, leathery, large leaves. The leaves are oblong to oval, 8 to 12 inches long and in various colors of dark green, deep maroon or marked with yellow, cream, pink or white.

The Tricolor rubber plant (*Ficus elastica 'Tricolor'*) has attractive green, cream and pink splotched leaves. Barbara H. Smith, ©2015 HGIC Clemson Extension

**Culture**
Rubber plants prefer bright light but are adaptable to low light. They grow best with the morning light from an east window. They do well in warm to average room temperatures. The ideal temperatures are 60 to 65 °F at night and 75 to 80 °F during the day. Avoid temperatures lower than 55° F, sudden drops in temperatures, and cold drafts.

Water rubber plants thoroughly, but let the soil dry slightly to the touch between watering times. Be sure the pot has proper drainage holes. If the pot is sitting in a saucer, empty out the excess water after watering the plant. The soil mix should be a well-drained houseplant mix. Rubber plants prefer humid conditions, but tolerate the dry air common in homes.

Fertilize regularly with a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer during active growth in the spring and summer. This should be done every two weeks. Plants that are in lower light should be fertilized less often.

Rubber plants may grow tall and lanky indoors. You can support them with a stake or prune them in spring to rejuvenate. Propagate new plants by stem or tip cuttings or air layering. Repot in late winter or early spring if needed.

Wash the leaves with water when they get dusty to keep them attractive and help your plant stay healthy.

**Problems**
In the home, plant diseases are very rarely a problem. Too much or too little water plus insects and mites are the main problems. Root rot usually results from a soil mix that does not drain quickly or overly frequent watering. For more information on watering plants see *HGIC 1459, Indoor Plants – Watering*. 

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Leaf yellowing may occur if the soil stays too wet. Too little light, dry air or cold drafts may cause leaf loss. Mealybugs may infest rubber plants. For more information on houseplant insects see HGIC 2252, Common Houseplant Insects & Related Pests.

The sticky white sap may irritate skin or the stomach if eaten. Keep these plants away from any pets or young children that tend to eat plants.

**Cultivars**

- 'Decora' is a widely available cultivar with dark leaves with creamy white midribs.
- 'Doescheri' has cream and gray variegated leaves with pink ribs.
- 'Foliis Aureo-marginata' has gold margined leaves.
- 'Robusta' has very large leaves up to 18 inches long. It is good in low light.
- 'Rubra' has leaves that are reddish when young and mature deep green with red edges.

The Rubra rubber plant (*Ficus elastica 'Rubra'*) has mature dark green leaves with red mid-ribs.

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- 'Tricolor' has green leaves with cream and pink patches.


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