

Ficus Lyrata

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Nutrient Requirements

The Lyrata can be grown nicely with a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer which is common for tropical foliage plants. It is possible that Lyratas need additional Calcium under very favorable growing conditions. I have not noticed the need for any extra nutrients on Lyrata other than the base program and occasional Calcium.

Water Requirements

Lyrata will use water quickly in the nursery environment, but at the same time seems to be very tolerant of short term dry conditions. In comparison to a Benjamina variety ficus the Lyrata will tolerate much dryer conditions and resist losing leaves. A Lyrata's first response to too dry conditions will be wilting of the newer softer growth at the top of the plant. In conditions favorable for growth this may be the last 4-5 inches of the growing stem but could be longer if grown in an environment that promotes soft stretchy growth. My suggestions for watering the Lyrata is to keep it on the dry side until you see the first signs of wilting then water it. You do not want to keep sending the plant into a wilt state, so adjust the watering schedule to prevent wilting the next time. Keeping the plant on the dry side has a negative side effect. When peat based soils dry they become hydrophobic which means they will resist rewetting. The best treatment for this is a rewetting agent. Re wetting agents are easy to use, can be applied only twice per year, maximize the time between waterings and assure you that you are not losing root supporting volume in your root balls. Both liquid and granular rewetting agents are available so choose the one that suits your situation best.

Other Environmental Requirements

Lyratas need good light. Light related problems are the only problems with Lyratas that we hear about with any regularity. A successful interior installation is going to require a skylight situation or a south facing window that allows good light penetration. We have reports of successful Lyrata installations where there is a North facing window with very good light penetration and I suspect that these situations would still be considered bright light environments. Remember that the shortest day of the year, in the northern hemisphere, is around December 22. On this day the sun is also at it's farthest point South. During the months surrounding this date the amount of sunlight entering a skylight or a North facing window are going to be reduced to the lowest level. I suspect that this is the root cause of reports about Lyratas doing poorly that we here about in the late Fall. As a reference, the longest day of the year when the sun is at it's farthest point North is around June 22.

The following photos show a Lyrata responding to a low light situation. Symptoms begin on the lower foliage and are dry brown necrotic spots usually associated with the terminal end of the major veins in the leaf. These progress to cover the entire leaf and the plant eventually sheds the leaf. The problem progresses upward with the newest growth being the last affected.





Insects and Disease

Lyratas are susceptible to many different insects. These are one of the most watched plants in the nursery for insect problems. I have seen 2-spotted spider mites, whiteflies, aphids, mealybugs and thrips on ficus Lyrata. The only major plant insect that I have not observed is scale. I'm sure there is a scale somewhere that would feed on the Lyrata. Whiteflies, thrips and aphids are probably less of a problem in interiorscapes than mites and mealybugs. For all of these insects, except mites, Imidacloprid or Dinotefuran (Merit, Marathon or Safari) are good choices. These can be applied to the soil as either a drench or incorporated granules which avoids spraying and works systemically. You must use both as a preventative treatment because the active ingredients take time to move through the plant. Some type of spray applied in addition to the soil treatment would give immediate control. Horticultural oil can be effective and safely used for this purpose. In my opinion the best treatment for mites are predator mites. This is a very safe and easy treatment, but the predators must be applied quickly or on a schedule as a preventative treatment. We use **Phytoseiulus persimilis** and **Amblyseius californicus** at the nursery. These mites are readily available from many different sources on the Internet. Try Koppert Biological, Biobest, or Syngenta Bioline.