

# Ficus Dieback

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## Background:

Indian laurel fig or Chinese banyan (*Ficus microcarpa* = *F. retusa*, *F. nitida*) is a popular choice for urban landscapes in California due to its dense canopy, ability to thrive in various soil types, and minimal maintenance. An outbreak of trees exhibiting branch dieback (Fig. 1) with associated cankers (Fig. 2) has recently been observed on ficus trees throughout Southern California. A survey and subsequent pathogenicity testing revealed this “ficus branch canker” is caused by a complex of *Botryosphaeria* fungal species including *Botryosphaeria dothidea*, *Neofusicoccum luteum*, *N. mediterraneum*, and *N. parvum*.

## Symptoms:

- Begin with crown thinning and leaf discoloration, often restricted to a particular branch (Fig 1).
- As the disease progresses, leaf and twig dieback is observed, followed by branch dieback.
- Cross section of infected branches reveals wedge shape canker tissues (Fig. 2).
- If the disease progresses into the main trunk or roots, the tree will eventually die.

## Disease Management:

- Prune dead limbs, twigs, and cankered branches carrying spore-forming structures at least five inches below infected tissues.
- Treat fresh pruning wounds with a fungicide (synthetic or biological) to prevent secondary infections.
- Avoid pruning during or immediately after wet conditions, when aerial spores can release.
- Properly dispose any pruned branches away from site.
- Sterilize pruning tools between each tree with 70% EtOH (ethyl alcohol), 5% bleach solution, or Lysol® cleaning solution (Fig. 3).



Figure 1. Healthy *F. microcarpa* (left) near a severely declining ficus tree.



Figure 2. Cross-section of cankered branch.



Figure 3. Sterilize pruning tools.