



## Ficus Hedge Heights

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**Question:** Our community has a perimeter ficus hedge. The intent of the hedge is to protect the privacy of the house owners and screen out noise and students looking for shortcuts. Over the years, the hedge has been maintained at a height of about 8 to 9 feet. Gradually the height and width of the hedge have become a problem for the company retained to maintain the hedge on a quarterly basis. If the hedge increases any further, (more costly) cherry-picker equipment will be needed to reach the top. On the advice of the company, the Board decided to prune the top of the hedge to 7 feet and allow it to grow back to a uniform 8 feet. The objective is to have a height that is healthy and maintainable at reasonable cost while preserving the privacy and barrier qualities of the hedge. However, a number of owners want to allow the hedge to grow to about 10 feet for the sake of privacy and noise screening. What would be an ideal height of a ficus hedge that would allow privacy and screening while preserving plant health...all at a reasonable cost of quarterly maintenance?

- Gene B., South Lee County



S.H. Brown



Close-up of leaves

S.H. Brown

**Answer:** The ficus hedge is probably *Ficus benjamina* or *F. retusa*. If left unattended, these banyan trees would grow to heights of over 60 feet tall and 100 feet wide. Forcing a ficus tree to remain at either 7 or 10 feet tall, and probably less than 10 feet wide, is inconsequential in relationship to its potential dimensions. For example, the plant in a hedge row would be 70 or 100 square feet compared to 6000 square feet growing unencumbered in an open field. These two species can be maintained for years as hedges in excellent appearance at either 7 or 10 feet tall. However, as living growing things, wanting to maximize their dimensions, sooner or later they will require radical surgery to maintain the desired height and discourage increasingly woody tissue. Thus, the choice of either 7 or 10 feet is not so much a horticultural decision but one of cost and human desires.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing [brownsh@leegov.com](mailto:brownsh@leegov.com). Visit his web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml> "Garden Doctor" video clips <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml> and flowering trees information at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA\\_Z.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml)