

# Plant of the Month

January  
2018

**Common Name:** Atherton Fig  
**Scientific Name:** *Ficus leptoclada* Benth.  
**Family:** Moraceae

## Etymology

**Genus:** *Ficus* – latin for Fig  
**Species:** *leptoclada* - meaning slender branches

## Distribution

Endemic to Queensland, occurs in North East Queensland and southwards as far as coastal central Queensland.

## Native Habitat

Grows in rainforest from sea level to 1200 m, often on disturbed sites in rainforest regrowth.

## Description

Tree to 15 m but not a strangler fig. The upper surface of the leaves is rough resembling light sandpaper.

## Flowers

One of the most distinctive features of our tree and this species is its cauliflorous flowering. In this type of flowering, common to rainforest trees, flowers, or in this case, collection of flowers (inflorescence) are produced on the trunk and woody stems.

Individual fig flowers are held inside a unique type of inflorescence called a synconium, a fleshy receptacle of overlapping bracts that enclose the male and female flowers. Overlapping bracts meet at the end of the synconium at a point known as the ostiole. The receptacle excludes most insects, but tiny female wasps can penetrate the ostiole and reach the flowers.

The wasp is attracted to the flowers by smell. As she moves inside the synconium she scatters pollen from her birth fig and injects her eggs into the flowers. Male wasps emerge

first, blind and wingless and chew through the gall that surrounds them with their strong jaws. They also chew through the galls encasing females and mate with them.

The fertilised females, covered in pollen, emerge and take flight looking for ripe flowers to continue the cycle.

One of the remarkable features of the relationship between figs and wasps is that it is species specific. Each species of fig has its own species of pollinating wasp.

## Fruit

Once pollination has taken place, the globular or ovoid fruit (infructescence) swells to 20 x 17 mm and ripens to a dark red or burgundy colour.

## Location in Garden

Australian Rainforest - Bed 65i.



    
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