

All about the rubber fig

By Dr CHRISTOPHER TEH

Do you have a question about plants or how to maintain your garden? Send your questions to the Plant Doctor! Email your questions to lifestyle@thestar.com.my with "Plant Doctor" in the subject field. Questions may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Dear Plant Doctor,

Q Can I ask what plant is this? Are its roots invasive and will they spread sideways and later damage the surrounding road? What is your recommendation on whether I should maintain it, and if yes, how can it be managed? Or should I remove it and keep it in pots? Thank you. – *David Guay*

The tree is most likely a *Ficus elastica* or rubber fig, based on the broad, glossy leaves and reddish-purple hue of the new growth. This species is a popular choice for ornamental purposes because of its attractive foliage, low light tolerance and ease of care.

However, *F. elastica* roots can become invasive, particularly as the tree matures. The roots have a strong and aggressive system that can spread sideways, potentially causing damage to nearby structures such as roads, sidewalks and building foundations.

While root barriers made of metal or concrete can be installed around the tree to con-



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tain the spread of its roots, regular pruning is also necessary to control its size and, indirectly, the extent of its root system.

In your photo, there are five trees planted in close proximity to each other and to a nearby wall and road, which will likely pose a problem in the future.

Consequently, it would be best to remove these trees and transfer them to larger pots or containers. Pots limit the size to which the trees can grow, both above and below the ground. Potting also allows for greater control over tree growth conditions.

If you choose to pot the trees, ensure adequate drainage and repot them into larger pots as needed to accommodate their growth.

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