EPPO Datasheet: *Ceratocystis ficicola*

Last updated: 2026-04-20

IDENTITY

Preferred name: *Ceratocystis ficicola*
Authority: Kajitani & Masuya
Taxonomic position: Fungi: Ascomycota: Pezizomycotina: Sordariomycetes: Hypocreomycetidae: Microascales: Ceratocystidaceae
Other scientific names: *Ceratocystis fimbriata f. sp. caricae* Kajitani & Kudo
view more common names online...
EPPO Categorization: A2 list, Alert list (formerly)
view more categorizations online...
EPPO Code: CERAFC

more photos...

Notes on taxonomy and nomenclature

Ceratocystis canker was first reported on fig trees in Aichi Prefecture, Japan, in the 1970s and 1980s (Kato et al., 1981, 1982; Kato & Miyagawa, 1980). At that time, the disease was considered to be caused by *Ceratocystis fimbriata* sensu lato, based on morphological observations. *Ceratocystis fimbriata* has been reported on *Ficus* species in other countries (e.g. Brazil), where a high mortality of *F. carica* was attributed to *C. fimbriata* (Harrington *et al*., 2011; Kajitani & Masuya, 2011). However, Kato et al. (1981, 1982) noted that the perithecia of the causal fungus were larger than those of *C. fimbriata*. Kajitani and Kudo (1993) confirmed morphological and physiological differences between the fungus on fig trees in Japan and *C. fimbriata* and proposed a new forma specialis, that is, *C. fimbriata* f. sp. *caricae* Kajitani et Kudo. However, Kajitani and Kanematsu (1997) considered the fungus to be a species distinct from *C. fimbriata*.

Kajitani and Masuya (2011) described the causal fungus of Ceratocystis canker of fig in Japan as *Ceratocystis ficicola* sp. nov. based on morphological characteristics and DNA data. Further studies of DNA data have shown that *C. ficicola* resides in the Asian-Australian clade of *Ceratocystis*, while *C. fimbriata* is in the Latin American clade (Liu et al., 2017).

Tsopelas *et al*. (2021) noted that although the disease is commonly referred to as Ceratocystis canker, both cankers and wilt occur (cankers precede and trigger wilt) and the disease is best described as canker-wilt.

HOSTS

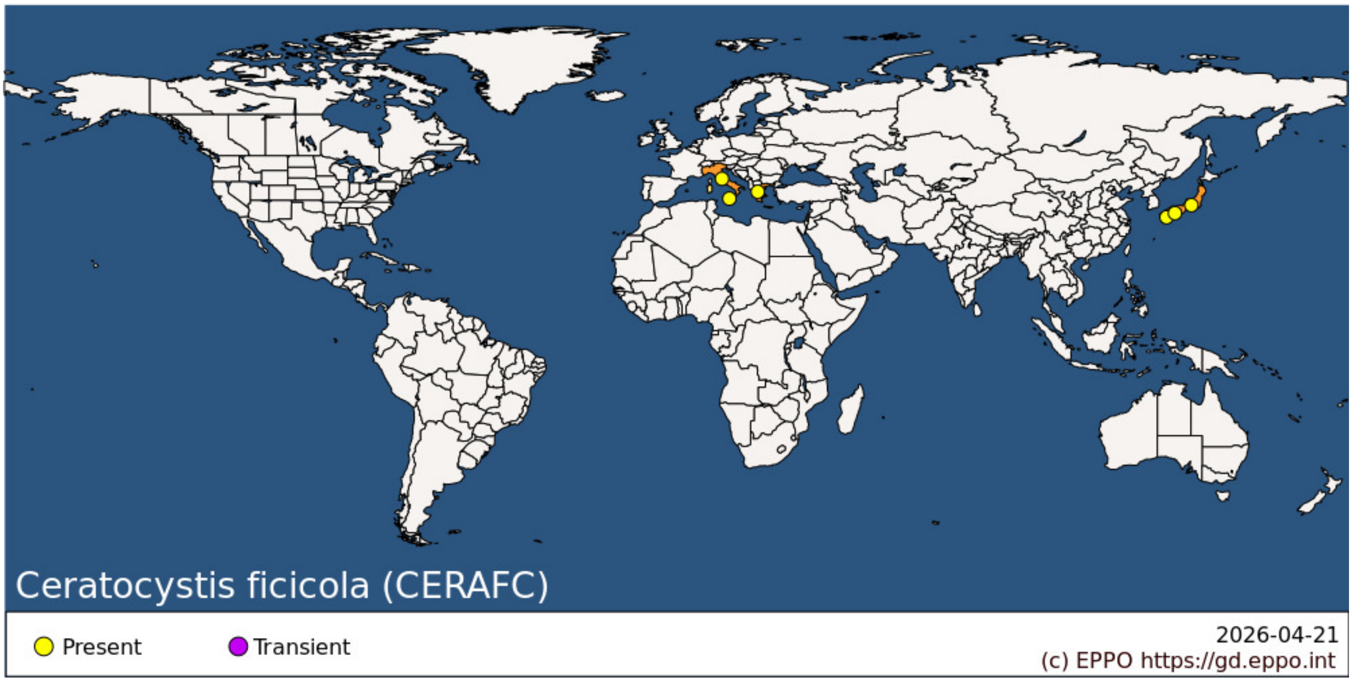
Ceratocystis ficicola has a narrow host range with only one species *F. carica* (fig) known to be attacked under field conditions (Kajitani & Masuya, 2011; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). The susceptibility of fig cultivars varies and information about susceptibility of fig cultivars and varieties to *C. ficicola* is limited and sometimes contradictory.

Ficus benjamina proved susceptible in inoculation experiments conducted in Greece (Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021).

Host list: *Ficus carica*

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Ceratocystis ficicola was first described from Japan in 1981. It has since been reported in 33 of the 47 prefectures of Japan (Kajitani & Masuya, 2011; Kajitani, 2017; Y. Kajitani, 2023, pers. comm.). In the EPPO region, *C. ficicola* has been reported from Greece (Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021) and Italy (including Sicily) (Crous *et al.*, 2023; Habib *et al.*, 2023).



EPPO Region: Greece (mainland), Italy (mainland, Sicilia)
Asia: Japan (Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku)

BIOLOGY

The life cycle of *C. ficicola* has not been fully described. However, the overall life cycle of different *Ceratocystis* species is similar (Cabrera *et al.*, 2016). In general, *Ceratocystis* species have teleomorph (sexual) and anamorph (asexual) stages of reproduction (Nasution *et al.*, 2019). Ascospores are formed in the ascus and are released on the top of the neck of the perithecium. Unlike conidia, ascospores are held together in a sticky, hydrophobic matrix, not readily separated by water, but they can adhere to the hydrophobic exoskeleton of insects. Asexual reproduction results in the production of conidia that are formed from conidiophores developing from the mycelium and can extend in a filament chain.

Both ascospores and conidia can be spread by insects and can potentially be dispersed locally by rain and water (EPPO, 2023; Harrington, 2013; Kile, 1993; Luchi *et al.*, 2013). Perithecia and ascospores of *C. ficicola* are formed on freshly cut wood surfaces. Endoconidia of *C. ficicola* have also been observed inside the infected wood (Kajii *et al.*, 2013). According to Harrington (2013), all *Ceratocystis* species that affect woody plants can start infections through wounds and spread into the sapwood tissues. This is also true for *C. ficicola*; inoculation studies have shown that aboveground parts of trees can be infected through wounds (Kajii *et al.*, 2013; Sumida *et al.*, 2016).

Ceratocystis ficicola produces aleurioconidia (long lived spores) in infected wood. Harrington (2013) noted that aleurioconidia that are produced in wood can probably survive digestion by woodboring insects and can be found in frass and sawdust. Species that form aleurioconidia can also be soil-borne pathogens that can directly infect roots.

In Greece, *C. ficicola* has been consistently isolated from soils associated with dying fig trees. Kajii *et al.* (2013) noted that the pathogen invades the roots and the main stems of host plants, causing xylem dysfunction and wilt symptoms on infected fig trees.

It is not known how long aleurioconidia of *C. ficicola* survive in the soil, but based on evidence of survival for similar species, the EPPO PRA considered this could be for more than 4?months (EPPO, 2025).

Spores of *C. ficicola* are not considered airborne; however, insect frass contaminated with spores may be moved by wind, rain splash or running water over short distances. New infections may arise if the frass comes into contact with fresh wounds on the trees and can also contaminate the soil in fig orchards (Harrington, 2013; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). Local spread by the ambrosia beetle, *Euwallacea interjectus* (Coleoptera: Curculionidae), has been observed and documented for Japan (Morita *et al.*, 2012). Dispersal due to human activity, such as via machinery and equipment that have been previously used in infested areas, is mentioned in the literature (e.g. Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021).

DETECTION AND IDENTIFICATION

Symptoms

Symptoms of *C. ficicola* are similar to those of many other *Ceratocystis* species (Nasution *et al.*, 2019).

External symptoms on trunk and shoots include lengthwise canker lesions (Miwa *et al.*, 2014), lesions near buds (Miwa *et al.*, 2014), reduced/stunted shoot growth (Morita *et al.*, 2018). On mature trees, extensive bark cankers form at the bases of the trunks (Morita *et al.*, 2018; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021), on the lower part of the trunk and in some cases on lateral branches (Habib *et al.*, 2023). Symptoms on the foliage include thinning and yellowing (chlorosis) of the foliage (discoloration; wilt; defoliation), either on some of the branches or over the entire crown (Habib *et al.*, 2023; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). In some trees, most of the leaves drop by the end of summer, while some of the unripe fruits remain on the trees indicating rapid tree death (Morita *et al.*, 2018; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). Infected trees have necrotic roots (Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021).

Internal symptoms include necrotic dark brown sapwood (xylem discoloration) visible after removal of the bark in the lower part of the trunks, and these lesions extend upwards (Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). Necrotic sapwood can be present with no external symptoms (cankers, wilt).

The affected trees eventually die (Morita *et al.*, 2016; Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021). In some cases, symptoms are not expressed until 3?years after planting (and infection) and the number of dead trees increases 3–5?years after planting. Time between leaf wilt and tree death was approximately 1?month; tree mortality rate was 90% after 10? years (Morita *et al.*, 2018).

Morphology

A detailed morphological description of the pest is provided by Kajitani and Masuya (2011), Tsopelas *et al.* (2021) and Crous *et al.* (2023).

The anamorphic characteristics of *C. ficicola* are almost the same as those of other species in the *C. fimbriata* s. l. complex, but *C. ficicola* does not have apparent doliiform conidia, which are seen on many other species of *C. fimbriata* s. l., except for *C. fimbriata* s. str. This characteristic, together with the size of perithecia, helps with the morphological identification of *C. ficicola*.

Tsopelas *et al.* (2021) noted that morphological characteristics of the Greek isolates were identical to those of the Japanese isolate, except for the dimensions of the endoconidia. The Japanese isolate had endoconidia of 5–9.5?×? 4.5–8??m, whereas those in the Greek study were 12–40?×?4–7??m.

Detection and inspection methods

Visual examination is not an appropriate method for the detection of *C. ficicola* as some infected trees can be asymptomatic. Samples should be sent to the laboratory for testing (e.g. molecular identification). For accurate diagnosis, isolation and identification of the causal agent is necessary. However, no recognized international standards are available for detection and identification of *C. ficicola*.

In Japan, a baiting method has been developed to detect *C. ficicola* in soil (Kajitani, 1995; Morita *et al.*, 2013). A baiting method for the detection of *C. platani* (EPPO, 2014) was used by Tsopelas *et al.* (2021) to detect *C. ficicola* in soil and turned out to be very reliable and faster than the one described by Morita *et al.* (2013).

A TaqMan real-time PCR test based on the ITS region can be used for identification of *Ceratocystis* species at the generic level. Specific conventional and real-time PCR tests for *C. ficicola* are under development in UniBa, Italy (EPPO, 2025). In the meantime, the use of multiple barcode regions can provide sufficiently reliable specific identification.

Sequences of ITS, TEF1, TUB2, RPB2 genes of *C. ficicola*, including that of the type material, are present in NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023). ITS sequences are available in BOLD (Barcode of Life Data, 2023).

PATHWAYS FOR MOVEMENT

Ceratocystis ficicola has not been intercepted on any pathway in international trade. A number of possible pathways have been suggested in the literature, including plants for planting and conveyance vehicles and equipment. The EPPO PRA identified *Ficus carica* plants for planting as the main pathway for entry into the EPPO region. Plants for planting in pots with growing media, bonsai plants and bare rooted plants have the highest risk. Conveyance vehicles and equipment that have been operated in a fig production area may present a pathway for entry.

PEST SIGNIFICANCE

Economic impact

In Japan, *C. ficicola* has caused serious losses in several fig plantation areas (Kajitani & Masuya, 2011). Some farms abandoned their orchards because of the extensive damage caused by *C. ficicola* (Shimizu *et al.*, 1999). Morita *et al.* (2012) showed that, in combination with *E. interjectus* infestation, *C. ficicola* can infest 88% of fig trees in an orchard and induce 45% mortality. In Hiroshima Prefecture, the rate of damage in fig orchards is estimated to be 15% (EPPO, 2025). The total loss due to the presence of the pest is estimated to be 12.4 million EUR per year for the worst-case scenario in the whole of Japan (EPPO, 2025).

In Greece, infected trees have been reported to die. In a newly planted 6?ha orchard on Euboea Island on land that had not previously been used for fig tree cultivation, approx. 40–50% of the trees were dead or dying with evident disease symptoms 3?years after planting (Tsopelas *et al.*, 2021).

In Italy, in the Salento area (Apulia) in severe cases, tree mortality was documented. Affected plants showed symptoms of leaf wilt and extensive defoliation. In two orchards located in Salice Salentino and Squinzano, disease incidence exceeded 80% (Habib *et al.*, 2023).

The main fig cultivars in commercial production are susceptible to the pest. Economic losses can be expected in areas where the pest can establish outdoors. If *C. ficicola* becomes established and spreads in the EPPO region, this may promote decline in fig production. Impact will be more severe in the Mediterranean countries where fig trees are commercially cultivated. The negative impact can potentially also include increased costs for control practices (EPPO, 2025).

If *C. ficicola* becomes widely established in Mediterranean countries, there may be economic consequences for producers of *F. carica* plants for planting. Plants may need to be grown under strict protected conditions which can be costly. In addition, research and development of resistant cultivars may increase the cost of fig plants. The absence of available control methods will influence potential impact as there are currently no effective fungicides approved for use in the region to control *C. ficicola*, and no resistant varieties of fig. Using rootstocks would increase costs for fruit production.

Control

Chemical control

Several chemical fungicides have previously been proposed in Japan to eradicate the disease with a soil application (drenching the soil around the plants) (Hirota *et al.*, 1984; Shimizu *et al.*, 1999; Togawa *et al.*, 1999; Morita *et al.*, 2018; see more details in EPPO, 2025). The suggested protocols assumed two applications of fungicides per year (spring and autumn) or even monthly applications (from March to November), with possible seasonal alternation of different active substances (Hirota *et al.*, 1984). The effectiveness of some methods was enhanced by mulching the soil with polyethylene film and adjustment of the soil pH to 8.0 (Hirota *et al.*, 1984).

The potential use of fungicides in the EPPO region is limited, as most of the fungicides mentioned in literature are not approved in the EU.

Use of resistant rootstock

In Japan, the only control/containment solution currently used is the use of highly resistant rootstock, for example, BC1 hybrids 'Reikodai 1 go' (Morita *et al.*, 2021; Kamimori *et al.*, 2022). This highly resistant rootstock (although not immune) has been on the market in Japan since 2022 (S. Jikumaru, 2024, pers. comm.). The EPPO PRA considered that there are no truly resistant cultivars or interspecific hybrids of *F. carica* (EPPO, 2025).

Biological control

There are no known biological control measures available for this pest. In Japan, as *E. interjectus* has been suggested to vector the pest, Kuroda (2013) and Morita and Jikumaru (2013) recommended the development of pest management measures to control this beetle. Jiang and Kajimura (2020) demonstrated that the earwig *Forficula auricularia* L. (Dermaptera: Forficulidae) has some potential as a biological control agent against *E. interjectus*.

Sanitation

Saranya (2021) suggested disinfection of pruning and grafting tools as supplementary control measures based on the strategies known to control other *Ceratocystis* pests. *Ceratocystis platani* has been controlled by removing and burning infected material (Forest Research, 2024). This method can also be applied for infected fig trees.

Phytosanitary risk

Ceratocystis ficicola has already established in limited areas of Greece and Italy. The pest is more likely to establish outdoors in Mediterranean countries with commercial fig production than in other areas (e.g. Northern Europe). It can establish under protected conditions as well. The EPPO PRA (EPPO, 2025) assessed the potential magnitude of spread to be moderate with human-assisted spread being the main contributing factor. If the pest becomes established, the potential magnitude of impact in the EPPO region would be similar to that in the current area of distribution. The impact may differ depending on the country, and the speed at which control measures can be developed, authorized and implemented (EPPO, 2025).

PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

EPPO (2025) recommends phytosanitary measures for *F. carica* plants for planting (except seeds, tissue culture, pollen) with or without growing media. Options include pest-free area (PFA), pest-free place/site of production or pest-free production site. Because a 3-year asymptomatic period has been observed for the pest, surveillance should be carried out for several growing periods. There should be restrictions on the movement of host material, soil associated with hosts and equipment used (originating from areas where the pest is known to be present) into the PFA, and into the area surrounding the PFA, especially the area between the PFA and the closest area where the pest is known to be present.

Post-entry quarantine (in the framework of a bilateral agreement) is also a recommended measure, where inspection and testing could be conducted for three growing seasons (EPPO, 2025).

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Datasheet history

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