

FIG TREES

By Sharon Meija, University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Calaveras County

There are over 700 cultivars of Fig trees around the world. These trees are one of the easiest to grow.

They are ideal for a Mediterranean climate with mild, damp winters and dry, hot summers.

Figs in our area need a sunny spot protected from winter winds; it takes a great deal of heat for the fruit to mature properly.



If you live where temperatures drop to 10 degrees, planting the Fig in a container is a solution.

Fig trees do best in well-drained soils, but will tolerate wet soils better than most other fruit trees.

Mulch the trees with compost 2 to 4 inches deep; renewing this monthly from spring to harvest provides all the nutrients necessary.

Trees may reach heights of 15 to 30 feet with an equal spread; once established, they need only occasional watering.

Ficus carica 'Brown Turkey' has a variegated fruit with rusted red to purple skin, pale green shoulders and rose flesh.

Ficus carica "Black Mission" produces figs with a black exterior and sweet pink flesh.

Pollination: In the "Common Figs", including the Brown Turkey and Black Mission Fig, pollination from a wasp or another tree is not required.

They are called self-fulfilling because the flowers that bear fruit are perfect, containing both male and female parts

Pruning: A fig tree can be trained into nearly any shape or size.

You can allow it to mature into a large, beautiful shade tree with a single trunk or multiple trunks.

The branch structure can be developed from an early age to create a jungle gym for climbing or limbs to sit on.

Large well-drained trees may require only light annual pruning.

Alternatively, you can also prune Fig trees so severely so that fruit can be picked without use of a ladder; Fig trees may also be espaliered.

To successfully prune the trees, you need to understand their bearing habit.

Most Fig tree varieties bear two crops: one in early summer and another in late summer and fall.

Buds for the first crop form the previous fall and over-winter as expanded buds arrayed laterally along the "one-year - old branches.

The second crop forms the following summer on the current season's shoots; this later crop usually has more fruit than the first.

Severe winter pruning can eliminate or reduce the first crop, but the tree will usually form a substantial second one.

As a general rule, thinning out the canopy by 1/3 should produce a good first crop.

While Fig trees do not require summer pruning, some thinning of shoots is warranted to reduce crowded branches in trees that are kept short.

Harvesting: Figs are harvested when just mature; once harvested, this fruit may further change in color, texture, and juiciness, but will not improve in sweetness or flavor.

Figs are ready for harvest when they release easily from the tree.

Some varieties, including the Brown Turkey and Black Mission Fig, have two crops per year, early and late.

The "breba" (first crop) matures in early to midsummer and the second crop matures in late summer or fall.

Fruit production decreases when there is a cold spring or cloudy summer.

The harvest stage depends on how you plan to use the fruit.

For immediate fresh eating, fully ripe is ideal.

For canning, the fruit should be firmer; for drying, fully ripe.

Figs can be eaten fresh or they can be frozen, pickled, or dried for future use.

For best flavor of dried figs, allow them to partially dry on the tree and then complete the drying process on drying trays.

You can let them fall naturally, but pick up quickly to avoid insects and disease.

Figs can be used in many dessert dishes and make great jam.

This beautiful tree might be a great choice for your yard.