



FIG TREE CARE

Fig trees are easy to grow! The fruit can be eaten fresh or used for cooking and baking. Fig trees do well in containers and in almost all types of soil. They can be kept as small as 6' with regular pruning.

Planting

Dig a hole deeper and wider than necessary for the root system. Amend with planting mix if soil is very heavy and dense. Inspect the roots and remove any broken or dried roots. Place the tree upright at the proper depth. Fig trees survive better if set 2 to 4 inches deeper than they were grown in the nursery. Crumble the soil around the roots, and pack it down several times during the filling operation to avoid air pockets. After planting, water the tree to settle the soil firmly around the roots. **Do not apply fertilizer at planting time.**

When transplanting (if tree has not been recently pruned) head back to develop lateral branches and reduce stress. Try to keep the root ball intact to minimize root disturbance. If the root system is damaged during transplanting, water uptake may be reduced.

Caution:

Fig trees planted at the beginning of the dormant season often develop root systems before leafing out in the spring. This can be advantageous; however, young trees are more susceptible to cold injury. In areas where cold damage may occur, it is often advisable to delay transplanting until just before dormancy is broken in late winter.

Watering

Give special attention to soil moisture management in fig culture. Most fig tree roots are close to the soil surface and can easily dry out. For these reasons, apply water to the trees as drying develops. Slight leaf wilting in the afternoon is an indication of water stress. If that is observed, water more frequently during hot weather. Mulching helps maintain uniform soil moisture and reduces weed competition.

Do not overwater in areas of heavy soil with poor drainage. This forces oxygen out of the soil and can cause injury to the tree. Good water management, including regular irrigation and mulching, helps maintain tree health and vigor and reduces fruit drop.

Pruning

Figs do not require regular pruning once established. Prune figs trees annually during the first three growing seasons in order to establish desired shape. In subsequent growing seasons prune only to stimulate new growth or to control size. Figs can bear fruit in the fall on the previous year's growth, so heavy pruning will result in lighter crops the following season. It is best to prune immediately after the main crop is harvested in early fall. Heavily pruned fig trees can be susceptible to sun burn, so it is a good idea to whitewash trees after heavy summer pruning with interior white latex paint, diluted 50-50 with water. Remove all weak, diseased or dead limbs each dormant season.

Where winters are mild, train fig trees to a single trunk, open vase-type tree. In areas where freezes occasionally kill the upper part of the tree a multi-trunk system with a bush shape may be a more advantageous pruning method. Figs can be easily trained as espaliers.

Fertilizing

Generally, fig trees do not require regular fertilizing. Excessive applications of nitrogen can have a negative effect on fruit quality. The one exception is for figs grown in containers, which should be fed three or four times a year with a balanced fruit tree fertilizer.

Cold Weather Protection

Factors influencing a fig tree's susceptibility to cold injury are related to the tree's entrance into dormancy. A mature tree which has lost all of its leaves and becomes totally dormant can withstand much cooler temperatures than a rapidly growing tree at the time of first frost. Reduce watering in the fall of the year to reduce growth and encourage the onset of dormancy. A fully dormant fig tree can withstand temperatures as low as 10 degrees F.

In areas where temperatures drop into the teens or twenties, additional cold protection is important for young trees. Placing mulch over the base of the tree in winter can protect the crown from killing frosts. Planting along the south side of a building can also help reduce freeze damage in cold areas. Also Christmas lights and polyester frost blankets can be used when the tree is young.

When trees or limbs freeze, give the tree ample time to grow before removing the frozen limbs. Prune frost damaged branches in the spring once the threat of heavy frost has passed.

Harvesting

In areas without heavy spring frosts, figs can bear two crops per year. The first crop, known as the breba crop, is produced in the spring on the previous year's growth. The second, main crop is produced in the fall on that year's growth. Thinning heavy crops will increase fruit size.

For best quality, allow figs to ripen on the tree, and pick as they ripen. Ripe fruit left on the tree will be vulnerable to dried fruit beetle predation and spoilage. On-the-tree spoilage or souring is caused by microorganisms in the fully ripe fruit. These organisms are usually carried into the open eye of the fig by insects, particularly the dried fruit beetle. Frequent harvest and the removal of overripe, spoiled figs can greatly reduce spoilage problems.

Use gloves and long sleeves when harvesting figs to prevent skin irritation from the fig latex which is exposed where the fruit is removed from the tree.

FIG VARIETY INFORMATION

CONADRIA FIG: Light greenish-yellow skin, pink flesh. Not as sweet as Kadota, but resists spoilage. Fresh/dried. Very vigorous, long-lived tree. Heavy crops, coast or inland. 100 hours. Self-fruitful

BLACK JACK FIG: Large, purplish-brown figs with sweet, juicy, strawberry-red flesh. Harvest August to October in Central California. Naturally small (semi-dwarf) tree. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

BLACK MISSION FIG: The favorite. Purplish-black skin, strawberry-colored flesh, rich flavor. Heavy bearing, long-lived, large tree. Coast or inland. Fresh/dry/can. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

IMPROVED BROWN TURKEY FIG: Large, brown skin, pink flesh. Sweet, rich flavor, used fresh. Widely adapted - coast or inland climate. Small tree, prune to any shape. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

KADOTA FIG: Large, light greenish-yellow 'white' skin, amber flesh. Long-lived, vigorous. Prune to any shape. Very sweet fruit needs hot weather to ripen. Fresh/dry/can. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

OSBORNE PROLIFIC FIG: Large fruit with very attractive purplish-brown skin, amber pulp. Especially pleasing flavor. Long-time favorite in cool

coastal areas, excellent inland as well. Prune to any shape. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

PETERS HONEY: Beautiful, shiny, greenish yellow fruit when ripe. Very sweet, dark, amber flesh. High quality. Superb for eating fresh . Warm location with a southern exposure is required for ripening fruit in maritime Northwest. Originated in Sicily. Good cold tolerance. Zones 6-10.

TEXAS BLUE GIANT FIG: Extra large fig with purple skin and amber flesh, very sweet, ever-bearing habit. Zones 6-10.

PANACHE "TIGER": Especially fine flavor! Small to medium sized fruit, green in color with yellow "tiger" stripes. Strawberry pulp is blood-red in color. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

WHITE GENOA FIG: Old variety, a favorite in cool coastal areas--also excellent inland. Greenish -yellow skin, amber flesh, distinctive flavor. Prune to any shape. 100 hours. Self-fruitful.

VIOLETTE DE BORDEAUX: Small to medium size purple-black fruit with a very deep red strawberry pulp, a distinctive sweet rich flavor. Excellent fresh or dried. Possible second early season crop, hardy. Good for container culture or small spaces. Zones 5-10.