



# Summer Figs

## Yummy and Healthful!

**Star-Tip 1029**

*Gardening Tips for successful and beautiful Landscapes and Gardens*

Fig trees are prolific bearers, so when clients grow them, they usually have more than they know what to do with. The delicate fruits need some protection if they are to be moved about. Figs do exceptionally well in The Southwest Desert!

**Figs enjoy two seasons.** In the Southwest like most parts of the country, you'll start seeing them ripen in June, and then in mid-August and September. Those that come later during the really hot weather, when the sugar is up and the flavor is more deeply concentrated are even more scrumptious.

Eating fresh figs plain is simply delicious, but to tease the most out of them and to extend the enjoyment, make them into many different kinds of tasty desserts: tarts, cookies, cakes and even ice cream.

### **Ripe figs are fragile and sweet-smelling**

When you find ripe figs, hurry them home and use them fast, or else stash them in the refrigerator. Most will hold for a few days, but ripe figs can spoil, even when kept in the fridge. They can be expensive to buy, so you'll want to savor every one.

A fig is ripe when it's soft and the thin skin rests close to the flesh, which is moist, fragrant, and sweet. Sometimes you'll see the skin splitting open to reveal the flesh. An unripe fig, on the other hand, is firm with a cottony white layer between the skin and the somewhat dry, undeveloped center.

**Coax slightly under ripe figs to ripeness** by leaving them on the kitchen counter for a day or two. Store them in a single layer rather than piled on top of one another; they're less likely to spoil that way.

Avoid figs that are resting on flattened sides or that are slumped in their containers. They've probably begun to "turn" from too much heat during travel. (You can tell sour figs by their smell.)

The tricky part about figs is that they need to be picked ripe because they won't get much better after they're picked. But with only a thin skin protecting the tender flesh, ripe figs are fragile and don't travel well. That's why the figs you find in stores are often not at their height of perfection.

**Planting and Care:** Like most all fruit trees grown in the Southwest, to make your tree a long term producer, plan on giving it a large root system. When you first plant your tree, follow Star Note #001 Planting Guide. Avoid digging your hole too deep, this only increases the risk of burying the root system sooner or later. If the hole is a bit deep, put rocks beneath the rootball. Rocks will not compress and so prevent the root system from sinking.

Most Important! During the second season add drips away from the tree. Keeping the watering at the base of the tree near the trunk will only encourage the development of a small root system. The result will be a tree that stresses during the hot months, and produces inferior fruit. Water deeply and never every day!

Fertilization is also vital. Feed your fig trees April, May and October. Don't put all the fertilizer at the base of the tree, and if you use a granular fertilizer don't forget to water it in several times manually! The food needs to reach the roots, not just be blown about on the ground.

### **Many varieties, all sweet**

Though there are many varieties of fig, and each has its own personality, You can use them more or less interchangeably in cooking, as long as they have plenty of flavor and sweetness. Here are some of the varieties you're most likely to find.

**Black Mission figs**, a large tree from 18 to 30 ft. or more. The Mission fig has medium sized fruit with thin dark purple skin and reddish-brown flesh. Missions are favorites for cooking and eating. Mission figs are teardrop in shape. These larger figs are the cream of the crop and sweeter than honey. Ripen mid June through September.



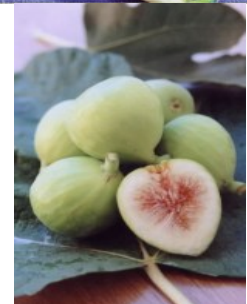
**Brown Turkeys**, a small tree usually from 8 to 12 ft. in height.

Large figs June through mid October. Brownish skin and pink flesh. A well known fig in the deep south. This plant is vigorous and produces a second crop of fruit in the fall.



**Kadota**, is a small tree usually from 6 to 12 ft. in height depending on its age.

It bears a small round fig with a green/yellow skin and a honey sweet center, and is loved around the world. Kadotas are available at the end of the fig season. The Kadota fig is truly nature's candy but needs heat to ripen. From mid August to October.



### **Figs don't need peeling**

A fig's skin is edible; no need to peel it, except for rough patches or when the skin is still on the thick side. It's always a good idea, though, to rinse off any dust. Leaving the skins on for the Fig & Anise Ice Cream gives more intense flavor.

If you are looking for planting a fruit tree that will give you plenty of delicious fruit, don't forget to consider a fig tree. Far from being an ornamental though, be prepared for a big fruit harvest!