

GROWING FIGS

In the Pacific Northwest the key to success with figs is choosing the right varieties. When completely ripe, figs are sweet and delicious – but they don't ship well, so you have to grow your own.

There are hundreds of named varieties of figs and their nomenclature is very confusing. Synonyms abound; some varieties have 6 or more different names. To make things even more complicated the same name is sometimes used for more than one variety. Even experts have difficulties distinguishing some varieties.

VARIETIES THAT DO WELL IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Desert King: large with dark green skin and pink flesh. Top rated and our most consistent cropper. It only produces one crop a year, growing on the previous season's growth. When pruning, don't remove more than half of last year's growth.

Lattarula: has amber colored flesh and a yellow-green skin. It is also called "Italian Honey Fig".

Neveralla: heavy bearer, has dark skin with peach colored flesh. Also called "Osborne Prolific".

Brown Turkey: most reliable in our region, is very sweet, with mahogany skin and light amber flesh. Hardy, heavy bearer of two crops of large figs.

Petite Negri: dwarf tree or bush, can be grown in a container and produces two crops of black fruit with red flesh, if it is brought into the greenhouse to finish ripening the second crop.

HOW TO GROWN FIGS

A well-drained fertile loam, close to neutral pH (6.0-6.5) is best. Figs love compost. Three times a year, apply 2 – 3 cups of a balanced fertilizer with micro-nutrients to mature trees. Figs will tolerate shade, but maximum sun is required for best fruit. Planting on the south side of a wall (min. 8+ hours of sun) and protection from cold winds are ideal. If we get a sudden arctic blast, young fig trees or bushes will die to the ground, but regrowth occurs from the roots. The root system is very shallow without a tap root and spreads.

Space fig trees 15' apart. Figs can be pruned as a bush and covered in the winter, or grown in a container and brought into the greenhouse in the winter. To promote open (vase-shape) branch structure, prune fig trees when they are dormant. Unpruned figs will become bushy with many scrawny branches and produce small-sized fruit. Remove dense growth and branches that cross.

Some home gardeners train their figs as bushes. Pick four or five strong, thick stems to keep, making sure they are well spaced, and will not crowd each other. If you want a tree, cut or pull out all suckers during the growing season.

PROPAGATING AND FRUITING

Figs can be propagated by rooting cuttings. You can expect fruiting in 2 – 4 years. Most figs are self-pollinating. The first (over wintering "breba" crop ripens in summer, and the second crop ripens early fall. Figs are ripe, when the fruiting body "droops" on the stem. DON'T PICK FIGS BEFORE THEY ARE COMPLETELY RIPE.

Figs have no diseases and are not attacked by pests.

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