



Ultimate Guide to Growing Figs – in the backyard or indoors

[Home](#) » Ultimate Guide to Growing Figs – in the backyard or indoors

Last updated: January 31, 2020

By: Angi Schneider

Fruits

This post may contain affiliate links. If you click on a link and make a purchase I may receive a commission. Thank you for supporting this site.

Because figs don't ship well, it's hard to find fresh figs in the local grocery store. Fortunately, fig trees are easy to grow and care for, making them perfect for growing in the backyard orchard.



Fig trees (*Ficus carica*) originated in Northwestern Asia and the Middle East. They were brought to the Americas by the Spanish in the sixteenth century.

I like knowing where plants originated from because it helps me understand what their growing conditions need to be. Figs will do best in USDA gardening zones 8-10 but can be grown in containers and colder climates and brought inside when it freezes.

Figs are [fast growing fruit trees](#) and are related to the [mulberry tree](#). They require similar conditions to grow and both are very low maintenance trees.



Planting and Growing Figs

Fig trees are best planted in late winter or early spring – this is especially important if you have long hot summers. Planting early will give the trees time to develop some roots and de-stress from being planted before the summer heat sets in.

Since figs are self pollinating, you only need one fig tree to get fruit. This makes fig trees perfect for planting in urban and suburban gardens.

Fig trees can get quite large (20+ feet tall and just as wide) but their growth can be restricted by planting them in a pot or a “fig pit”. If you live where winters are cold (zones 7 and below) planting in a container is necessary. If you have limited space then consider planting them in a container to strict their growth. Don't worry, you'll get figs!

A fig pit is basically a concrete box that's buried in the ground. The most common way to make on is to dig a large hole and line the sides with concrete garden pavers (16"X16" or larger). In the bottom 8" or so but rocks or broken garden pots for drainage.

A fig pit will restrict the root growth and keep the fig tree to a manageable size for a small yard.



Unlike other fruit trees, fig trees can be planted a little below the container depth. I usually plant them about 3" below the original container depth.

Figs trees can grow in part shade but they may not produce fruit or produce very little fruit. For best fruit production they need at least 8 hours of full sun a day.

Once the tree is planted, but it down by one-third to one-half. This will force the plant to focus on establishing roots instead of leaves. A few weeks after we planted our first fig tree, a rabbit ate it down to the ground. Of course, don't cut it back that drastically but don't be afraid of cutting it back when you plant it.

For the first year while the fig trees is being established but sure to water it regularly, especially during the hot summer. Once it's established you'll only need to water it if it didn't rain that week. Figs will drop their fruit if they dry out too much.

While the fig tree likes heat, and is somewhat drought resistant, the roots are really shallow for the tree size. Figs don't compete well with weeds and will benefit from being well mulched.

The type of mulch doesn't really matter, you can use cardboard, hay, straw, wood chips, etc, the important thing is that it stays mulched to reduce the weeds and help conserve the soil moisture.

We add [homemade compost](#) to our fig trees in the early spring. Other than that, we don't use any fertilizer on them. If you want to fertilize them you can water them weekly with a high-potash tomato fertilizer while the fruits are developing.





Fig Varieties

There are four main types of figs – Common Fig, Caprifigs, Smyrna, and San Pedro. The Common Fig is recommended for the [backyard orchard](#) because the other three have somewhat complicated pollinating requirements.

The Common Fig varieties develop figs parthenocarpically (without pollination). They don't have true seeds and the figs just seem to appear out of no where on current year wood. There will be no visible flowers, just fruit development.

Brown Turkey fig is a common variety in the South, producing two crops of figs – one in May and another in mid-summer. The first crop usually has large fruit while the second crop fruit is smaller.

Some say the **Texas Everbearing fig** is the same as the Brown Turkey fig – some say they aren't the same. Regardless of who is correct, to the home gardener, the only real difference between these two fig varieties is the name.

Celeste or **Malta** fig is more cold hardy than the Brown Turkey fig. It only produces one crop and needs very little pruning. The fruit is tightly closed which deters the dried fruit beetle.

Black Mission figs produce two crops of large, dark purplish figs. While their harvest is large, Black Mission fig trees are not as cold tolerant as some other varieties and are recommended for zone 8 and up

Desert King fig is cold hardy to zone 6 and will produce figs without intense summer heat. This makes it a popular fig variety for growing in colder climates.

Kadota figs are grown commercially in California and is highly adaptable to other climates. This fig variety is cold hardy to zone 5 if it's planted in a protected area. However, Kadota fig trees are more sensitive to drought and will produce rubbery fruit in drier climates (West Texas, for instance.)



Buying Fig Trees

If figs will grow in your area, most local nurseries will carry varieties that do well in your climate. That is where I would start, if I were going to buy fig trees.

If you can't find any local fig trees to buy, you can buy them from online nurseries, but you'll need to know what variety to grow. If you're not sure, ask the nursery.

Also, you probably will only need one tree to meet the fig needs of your family, once the tree is mature. So even if you have space don't plant 10 trees unless you plan on selling the fruit.

Propagating Fig Trees

Fruit trees can be somewhat expensive, so I suggest getting a sucker or cutting from a fig growing friend and starting your own fig tree if you can.

During the growing season, fig trees will send out suckers that can be removed from the roots and planted to start another tree.

Fig trees can also be started by [cuttings](#). Two of our fig trees were given to us from a friend who took cuttings from her tree (which was started as a cutting from her husband's grandmother's tree) and put them in a pot of soil. She watered the sticks and soil until they rooted and became trees.

You'll want to plant a fig variety that is known to do well in your climate. Figs do need a certain number of chill hours, although it's a very low number for all figs, so keep that in mind when you're looking at varieties.

If you don't really understand how your gardening zone, chill hours, and other gardening metrics affect your garden and growing season, I have a [short ecourse](#) that can help you out.





Pest and Problems

Our fig trees have been relatively pest and problem free. If I don't water them enough in the summer, the leaves will get brown and dry, and fall off the tree. Leaving a very scraggly looking tree.

If you're growing figs indoors or in a greenhouse, you'll want to keep a lookout for spider mites, although they can be on an outside tree too. The leaves will be speckled with pale yellow or bronze spots.

Velvet mites and some varieties of [lady beetles feed on spider mites](#). So [encouraging beneficial insects](#) and limiting pesticide use (even organic pesticides) is a good first step at controlling spider mites.

Figs can also be bothered by mealybugs, scale, or root-feeding nematodes. Your best bet for controlling these is to attract beneficial insects to the garden or releasing them in the greenhouse if that's where the figs are growing. If the infestation is severe you can use insecticidal soap or horticultural oil, just know that you'll also kill the beneficial insects in doing so.

Pests such as the dried fruit beetle can bore into the end of the fruit (the eye) and cause the fruit to sour. If you notice a fig oozing syrupy liquid, the fruit is soured. You might also notice a fermented smell. There's no real way to control this other than planting fig varieties that have tightly closed eyes, like **Celeste**.

The main pests you'll probably have with growing figs are birds and squirrels. Some people will net the fig trees to protect them from the birds and squirrels but that can be hard as the tree grows.

Our harvest is adequate for our needs, so I just share with the wildlife and don't worry about it.



Harvesting Figs

It's important to let figs get fully ripe before harvesting them as they won't ripen anymore after being picked. To tell if a fig is ripe, it should be fully colored whatever color it's supposed to be – purplish, brown, or even green.

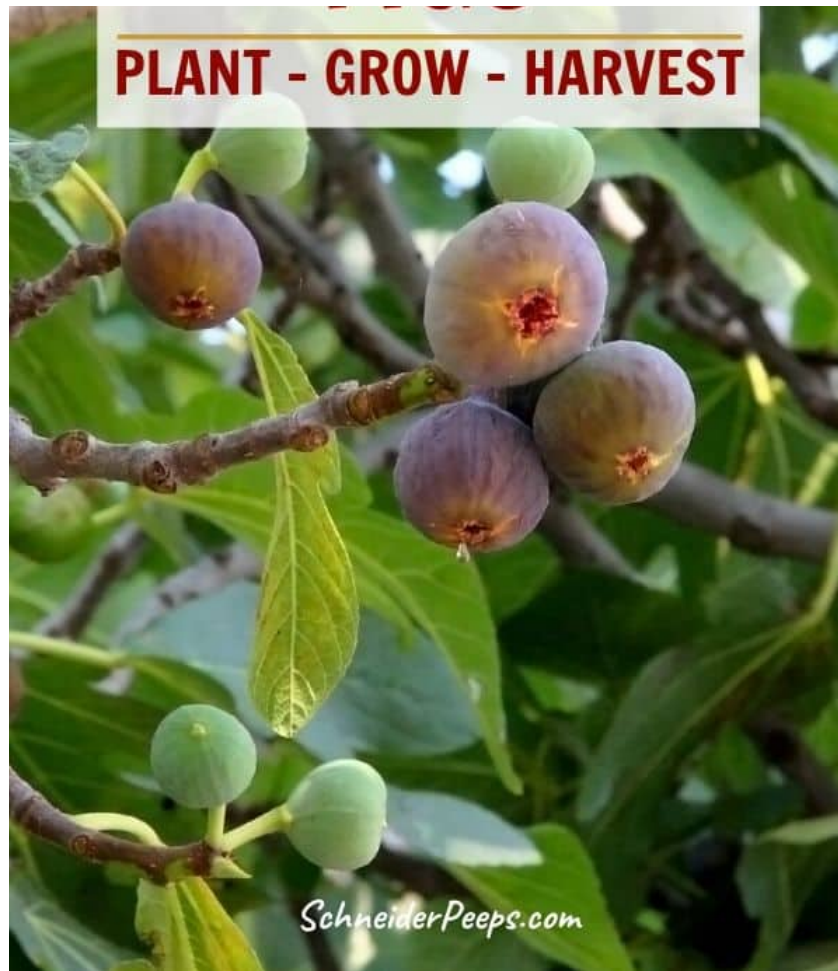
Once you start noticing the color change, you'll want to check the figs daily. Feel the fig, it should be soft and not hard. If it's ripe, it will probably fall off the branch as you're checking it. If not, gently tug it and it will.

If you notice any overripe figs or figs that birds have pecked into, remove them from the tree. The rotting fruit will attract pests.

Storing and Preserving Figs

Figs will only last a few days after being harvested, so make sure you have a plan for using or preserving them. If you find yourself with a bunch of figs that need to be dealt with and little time, they can be frozen whole. Just put them in a ziplock bag, label it, and toss it into the freezer.

These frozen figs can be used in cooking, canning, or even thawed and dehydrated. My favorite way to use frozen figs is to add them to smoothies – it helps keep our smoothie cost down.



Growing and Planting Sweet Potato Slips

[← Previous](#)

Using Honey for Allergies - breaking down the evidence

[Next →](#)

Bea

Wednesday 12th of May 2021

My gig tree hasn't grown much in height at all (neither has my orange tree) they both are able to produce fruit. But just don't appear to be growing taller. We live in southern AZ. They have been about the same height for atleast 2-3 years.

Angi Schneider

Wednesday 12th of May 2021

That's odd. The only things I can think of is to make sure they are getting enough water, but let them dry out between watering. During the height of our summer (Texas Gulf Coast) I water our trees once a week by laying the water hose down and letting it "flood" the area for about 15-20 minutes. This ensures the tree gets a deep drink but that it will not get waterlogged. Also, reduce watering while the fig tree is dormant in the winter - if you don't get any rain during the winter you might need to occasionally water. Lastly, are you fertilizing your trees? We top dress with compost and the litter from our chicken coop.

Larry Hill

Monday 29th of March 2021

I just planted a celestial fig tree about 4' tall. Do I need to cut it back before summer arrives? I live in South Mississippi.

Angi Schneider

Tuesday 30th of March 2021

It's best to prune fig trees when it's dormant in the winter. If your tree is already putting out leaves, I would just not prune it this year. I usually prune mine in late January or early February. Hope that helps.

CARMEN

Thursday 4th of March 2021

I'm bringing my year old potted fig tree out of the garage and back onto the porch for Spring/Summer. The tree is just one very tall branch that has a bud showing at the tip of the branch. Should I prune this? I kept thinking that branches would grow last year but it just kept getting taller with leaves. It was only about 12" tall when I bought it and transplanted it into the large pot it's in now. It is well over 6 feet tall now.

Angi Schneider

Friday 5th of March 2021

Hi Carmen, yes, fig trees should be pruned so they branch out.

Rosemary O'Garra

Friday 13th of November 2020

We have a huge fig tree that was on the property when we arrived. At least 30 feet tall. It is in the chicken run and is always loaded with fruit. They only grow to about 1 inch 2 and half cent then all fall off. We have never had a ripe fig. We pruned it quite severely 2 years ago. No change. I would live your input please.

Angi Schneider

Sunday 15th of November 2020

Lack of water can cause figs to fall off prematurely. During the summer, water deeply every week or two; just be sure to let it dry out some before watering again.

Lisa

Thursday 10th of September 2020

I have trouble with ants as soon as mine start to get ripe. Do you have any recommendations to keep the ants of my figs?

Angi Schneider

Friday 11th of September 2020

For the most part, we just try to pick them before the ants get them. Where I live, we have fire ants and one summer there was a huge fire ant bed at the base of our tree. I used spinosad on it and that helped a lot. This is the brand I buy. Spinosad is a naturally occurring bacteria and is safe for organic vegetable gardens, fruit and nut trees. Here's more information about it.



**Grab my new book
and start preserving
the harvest!**

