

How to Prune Brown Turkey Fig

By James Young; Updated September 21, 2017

One of the most cold-hardy fig varieties, the Brown Turkey grows well from Texas throughout the southeastern United States. Easily damaged by frost, the tree may be killed back to the ground in winter yet recover with vigorous new sprouts the following spring. With or without pruning, the Brown Turkey bears fruit, but correct trimming increases the yield and maintains the health of the tree.

Train the Brown Turkey fig to grow as a bush in areas where winter damage is likely. Prune away 1/3 the height of the newly planted tree to force sucker sprouting from the base. During winter dormancy, select a half-dozen vigorous shoots and cull the rest by shearing them off close to the ground. The individual trunks can grow to four inches across, so choose only those shoots spaced far enough apart for uncrowded growth.

Cut the top back again by a third in the second spring. Prune after the last frost but before the tree shows any new growth. Every year, cut out dead limbs by trimming winter-killed branches back almost to the living wood. Remove any crossed branches by cutting one of the pair back to its branch collar. Thin dense clusters of branches to allow light and air circulation within the canopy.

Replace damaged leader shoots by cutting broken or winter-killed trunks back to the ground. Select strong shoots to replace the broken trunks during the next winter pruning. Cut out any suckers not needed as main or replacement stems. As the fig grows access to the limbs becomes awkward. Use a pruning hook or pole saw to work within the thicket.

Train the Brown Turkey to grow in its natural form In warmer climates such as southern California. This variety grows to a small size of 15 feet or higher and often wider than it is tall. Pruning back limbs of older trees causes new fruit bearing growth the following year. Though pruning reduces the following year's crop by removing existing fruiting wood, the Brown Turkey fig bears a moderate crop on new branch suckers. Heavy pruning invigorates old unproductive trees.

Cut back winter-killed figs to several inches above ground level. Sucker shoots quickly replace dead trunks but will not fruit the first season. Planting in a protected area on the south side of a building helps prevent the loss of crops to severe winter cold.