

# Ray's Figs Ray's Figs

## American Fig Varieties

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## Essential Readings on a Confusing Subject

Ira Condit's seminal works, *Fig Characteristics Useful in the Identification*

*of Varieties*

*A Monograph*

and *Fig Varieties:*

are the most important sources of information on fig varieties.

His descriptions are based on his own work and on that of other serious researchers.

*Fig Varieties: A Monograph*

lists 89

varieties of caprifigs, 129 of Smyrna figs, 21 San Pedro figs, and 481 common figs for a total of 720 varieties.

This seems like an incredible number for a minor fruit. So many varieties. But, the number 720 is very misleading. A listing is often just that: a name and little more. Twelve "descriptions" do not even mention the fig's color. [In these and other cases with ludicrously little detail Condit was using someone else's description and not his own.] Much of the material in Condit's monograph consists of casual observations. His sources often omit essential details such as skin and pulp color, shape, flavor, and leaf shape. Relatively few sources offer adequate descriptions. Aside from Condit himself, useful sources of descriptions include the works of Baldini, Donno, Eisen, Gallesio, Mauri, Minangoin, Ozbek, Risso, Sauvaige, Simonet, Storey, and Vallese.

You can find full citations for these researchers in Condit's monograph. Eisen's work,

*The Fig: Its History,*

*Culture and Curing*

is relatively easy to find as it was printed

by the U. S. Government Printing Office in 1901. The works of the others are harder to locate. The only North American repository of Estelrich's study of the figs of the Balearic Islands, for example, is the University of California at Berkeley. They will lend this work through the InterLibrary Loan system, but were charging \$20.00 to do so in 1996. Fortunately, Condit quotes and summarizes the work of other researchers and it is considerably easier (but, not easy) to find his works.

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## How Many of the Descriptions are Useful?

To be useful in identifying figs, a description must include details of fruit AND leaves. If we apply this criterion, Condit's 720 varieties is much less formidable. He has useful descriptions of only 41 caprifigs (including 1 edible caprifig), 57 Smyrna figs, 13 San Pedro figs, and 122 common figs. This is a total of 233.

The average collector has no inedible caprifigs or Smyrna figs (except in Mediterranean climates where *B. psenes* can survive and pollinize figs). This means that only 136 of Condit's descriptions are of any great significance for American enthusiasts. **And**, that is not all. Many of the adequately described figs have never been imported into the United States. Specifically, only 1 edible

caprifig, 10 Smyrna, 6 San Pedro and 49 common figs. This is a total of 66--and 4 of these are now rare or extinct (in the U.S).

Of course, there are a lot of undescribed and inadequately described but distinct varieties. There are also some 20 varieties bred and/or released after Condit's monograph was published as well as unrecorded and unnoticed imports. Identifications in the following list are by Condit unless otherwise indicated.

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## Can Anything Be Done?

From a practical viewpoint we need a database of fig varieties to include color photographs of both fruit and leaves of varieties that have been carefully identified or whose provience is reliable. I hope to make a beginning on it this year by photographing appropriate figs in my own collection, scanning the photographs and incorporating them into the pages on identifying light and dark varieties as well as my price list page.

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