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Figs in the Home Garden I General Information

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The fig is sometimes called a "fruit without a flower." It does have flowers, however, that are borne on the inside of the fruit. Most fig varieties yield two *distinct* crops of fruit each year. The first crop (breba) is produced on the previous year's shoot growth; the second crop is borne in the leaf axils (where the leaf attaches to the stem) of the current season's growth. Mission, Kadota, and Osborn varieties yield both breba and second-crop figs. Other varieties, such as Brown Turkey, Adriatic, and Smyrna produce mainly second-crop figs. The amount of pruning can affect the quantity of the fruit, whether first- or second-crop figs. For example, severe pruning often practiced on Kadota figs, grown primarily for canning, drastically reduces the amount of breba (first crop). In New Jersey, if the trees are not wrapped or otherwise insulated or sheltered in winter, fruit buds on the previous season's growth will be killed.

Remember, figs are subtropical in origin and thrive in areas where winter temperatures do not drop below 15° F. Young trees can be damaged by early fall frosts when the temperature is 25-27o F. One problem in New Jersey is that frost usually kills the second or late season figs before they fully mature. Fig trees grow well in a variety of soils ranging from sandy loams to clay loams.

Consideration of the four types of figs is needed to explain the more common reasons for the failure of some trees to set and mature fruit.

CAPRIFIGS - usually inedible and are commonly known as male figs because of their pollen-bearing flowers. A small wasp will invade this fig, and carry pollen to other figs to achieve pollination. This insect, responsible for pollination, is not found in New Jersey due to cold winter temperatures.

SMYRNA TYPE - absolutely requires the stimulus of caprification for the fruit to set and mature. The Calimyrna fig is of this type. Figs such as Calimyrna should not be planted in backyards because of the difficulty in obtaining caprifigs containing fig wasps at the right time to achieve pollination.

SAN PEDRO TYPE - so-called because it includes the White San Pedro. Trees of this type set and mature figs on wood of the previous season with pollination of flowers. Figs appearing later in the season in the axils of the leaves (where leaf attaches to stem), on the same branches, will drop unless caprification takes place.

COMMON TYPE - sets and matures one or two crops of figs without caprification. First crop (breba) are generally few in number, but larger than figs of the second crop.

FIG VARIETIES

Common type

Panache - A French fig occasionally found in backyards and noteworthy because of its green and yellow striped fruit. Figs are medium in size, yellow when mature, with a strawberry colored pulp. Fair quality.

Marseilles - Grown in coastal sections of California for more than 75 years; sometimes known as White Smyrna. Figs of two crops are similar in character, medium, green, with white pulp and large prominent seeds. Good quality.

Kadota - Commonly has two crops. Brebas are above medium to large, green with violet, and light strawberry pulp. Second-crop figs are medium, green to yellow, with white meat and amber pulp, almost seedless. Very unsatisfactory as a

backyard tree, with fruit dropping badly or shriveling before maturity. Not recommended for home gardens.

Adriatic - One of the principal figs used in drying. Breba crop is very light and has large, green fruit with red-blood pulp. Second-crop figs are medium, green, and often have pink or amber pulp. Good quality.

Brown Turkey - Extensively planted in hot interior valleys of southern California and known for its heavy production of large figs. The breba crop is light with large, purple figs. Second-crop figs are large, greenish to purple with a hollow center, and pink pulp. Excellent quality when ripened on the tree.

Mission - Planted in coastal areas on the west coast. The breba crop is large, purplish-black, with pink pulp. Second-crop figs are medium, also purplish-black, with pink pulp. Excellent quality. This variety tends to have figs when others do not produce.

Celeste - Widely grown in Louisiana and other Southern States. No breba crop. Second-crop figs are small, pear-shaped with a long stock, brown to violet, with pink pulp. Good quality. Trees are not common, but generally productive.

Considering all of the figs mentioned, Brown Turkey and Celeste would be the recommended varieties for New Jersey backyards. The primary reason is that these varieties do not require pollination to produce fruit. Brown Turkey is also recommended because it matures the second crop of figs earlier in the season than other varieties mentioned.

Many homeowners have fig trees that either do not bear fruit or the fruit develops to the size of a quarter and falls off, or the fruit does not mature before the first hard frost in the fall. For further information see [FS189 "FIGS IN THE HOME GARDEN II: Culture and Management Problems."](#)



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