



Section XXIV. Figs. I. Cultivation

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Description

This section is from the book "[Commercial Gardening Vol3](#)", by John Weathers (the Editor). Also available from Amazon: [Commercial Gardening, A Practical & Scientific Treatise For Market Gardeners](#).

Section XXIV. Figs. I. Cultivation

The Fig (*Ficus Carica*), although a native of the Mediterranean region and south-western Asia, is fairly [hardy](#) in most parts of England and Ireland, and quite hardy in the mildest parts. As a [market](#) or commercial crop it does not figure largely. It is, however, grown in almost every large garden of repute, either on walls with a southern [aspect](#) or in [pots](#) in [greenhouses](#). It has large deeply [lobed leaves](#), and is remarkable for its thick milky juice and the [pear-shaped](#) "fruits " which are borne on the young branches.

The fruits are interesting from a structural point of view. If turned inside out they would resemble the [Strawberry](#) "fruit" somewhat in character. What is eaten as the fruit is really the fleshy [receptacle](#) on the inner surface of which the [flowers](#) are borne. In one form of the Fig, known as "Ficus", female [flowers](#) only are borne; in another form, called "Caprificus ", male flowers are borne near the opening, and what are known as " gall" flowers lower down. The gall flowers do not produce [seeds](#), but are used by a small wasp (*Blastophaga grossorum*) in which to deposit its eggs. The larvae from these occupy the ovary and form a gall. In crawling in and out of the flowers these little wasps carry the pollen from the male to the female flowers, and thus ensure [fertilization](#). The illustration (fig. 377), from Kerner and Oliver's Natural History of [Plants, shows](#) the fruits, with male and female flowers, and the insects which visit them. The visits of the insects from one kind of flower to the other result in the process known as " caprification ". It is thought that this is essential to secure the best fruits. In the British Islands, however, excellent Figs are produced without the caprification process.

Open-Air Culture

Fig [trees](#) flourish in warm, sheltered, and sunny spots in any good garden [soil](#) that has been deeply dug or trenched and well manured. The best time to plant is about March or April, in mild weather and when the soil is friable and easily worked. Autumn [planting](#) is not to be recommended, as the plants are likely to suffer in the event of severe [frosts](#) overtaking them. The soil should be made firm about the [roots](#), and to prevent grossness of [growth](#) a slight dressing of [basic slag](#) (2 oz. to the [square](#) yard) or some [lime](#) should be sprinkled over the [border](#) early in spring - more particularly if an annual top-dressing of well-rotted [manure](#) is given the preceding autumn. The fruits appear on the young shoots, and those that are first to ripen are already to be seen on the plants in autumn and winter when the [leaves](#) have fallen. In the sketch (fig. 378) the large fruits shown at a are not likely to pass safely through the winter in the open air; while the smaller ones, shown at b, will. Beneath the smaller fruits there is a bud from which a new shoot will develop in spring. As the large fruits that are on the shoots in early winter never have a chance of ripening outside, they should be removed. This will induce the trees to throw out a better supply of fruiting shoots in spring.

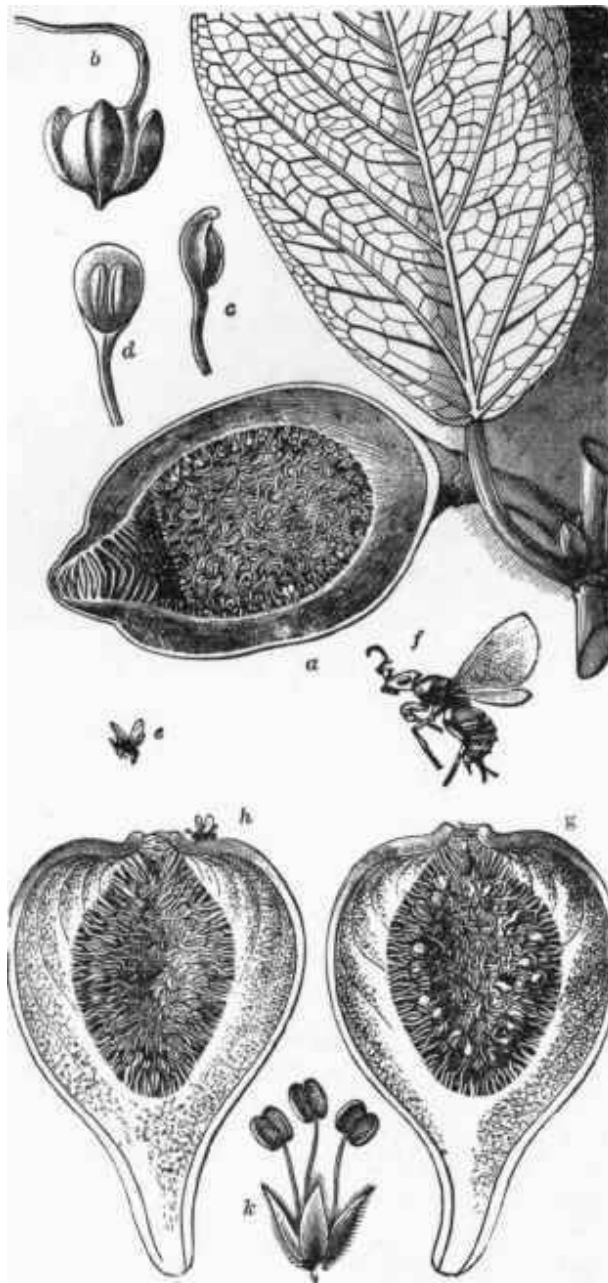


Fig. 377. a, Twig with inflorescence of *Ficus pumila*; the urn-shaped inflorescence (or synconium) cut through longitudinally, b, [Single](#) female flower from the bottom of the synconium of *Ficus pumila*. c, d, [Stamens](#) of the same plant from the upper part of the synconium. g, Synconium of *Ficus Carica* full of gall-flowers produced by *Blastophaga*, cut through longitudinally; near the mouth of the cavity is a Fig-wasp (*Blasto--phaga grossorum*) which has escaped from one of the galls. h, Synconium of *Ficus Carica* full of female flowers, cut through longitudinally; near the mouth of the cavity are two Fig-wasps, one of which has already crept into the cavity, whilst the second is about to do so. k, Male flower, e, A liberated *Blastophaga grossorum*. f, The same magnified, a, e, g, h, natural size; 6, c, d, k x 5; f x 8.

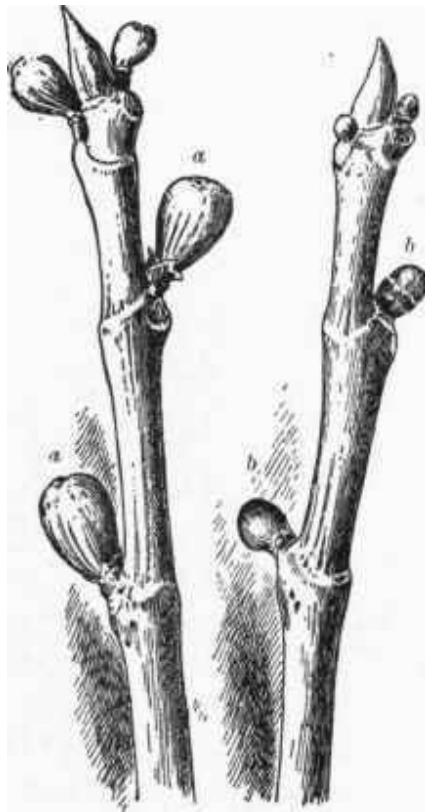


Fig. 378. - Fig-shoots.

a, Fruit-buds too large to winter: b, fruit-buds of right size to winter.

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