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## How to Manage and Identify Fig

 By [Steve Nix](#), About.com Guide

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### Introduction:

Common fig (*Ficus carica*) is a small tree native to southwest Asia. This edible fig is widely grown for its fruit and is commercially grown in the United States in California, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

The fig was one of the first plants ever to be cultivated by humans. Fossilized figs dating to 9400-9200 BC were found in an early Neolithic village in the Jordan Valley. About's Archaeology Guide, Kris Hirst says figs were domesticated "five thousand years earlier" than millet or wheat.

### Specifics:

Scientific name: *Ficus carica*  
Pronunciation: FIE-cuss  
Common name(s): Common fig. The name is very similar in French (figue), German (feige), Italian and Portuguese (figo).  
Family: Moraceae or mulberry  
[USDA hardiness zones](#): 7b through 11  
Origin: native to Western Asia but distributed by man throughout the Mediterranean region.  
Uses: garden specimen; fruit tree; seed oil; latex  
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree.

### Fig's Range:

There are no native figs in the United States. The first fig brought to the New World was planted in Mexico in 1560. Figs were introduced into California in 1769. Many varieties were imported from Europe. The fig reached Virginia and the eastern United States in 1669. From Virginia, fig planting and cultivation spread to the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

### Description:

Leaf: deciduous leaves are palmate, deeply divided into 3 to 7 main lobes, and irregularly toothed on the margins. The blade is up to 10 inches in length and width, fairly thick, rough on the upper surface, softly hairy on the underside.

Flower: small and inconspicuous

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for clearance;

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

### Fruit:

What is commonly accepted as a "fruit" is technically a syconium, a fleshy, hollow receptacle with a small opening at the apex partly closed by small scales. It may be obovoid, turbinate, or pear-shaped, 1 to 4 inches long, and varies in color from yellowish-green to coppery, bronze, or dark-purple. Tiny flowers are massed on the inside wall. In the case of the common fig the flowers are all female and need no pollination.

### Propagation:

Fig trees have been raised from seed, even seed extracted from commercial dried fruits.



Common Fig

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Ground or air-layering can be done satisfactorily, but the tree is most commonly propagated by cuttings of mature wood 2 to 3 years of age, 1/2 to 3/4 inches thick and 8 to 12 inches long. Planting must be done within 24 hours and the upper, slant cut end of the cutting should be treated with a sealant to protect it from disease, and the lower, flat, end with a root-promoting hormone.

#### Common Fig Varieties:

'Celeste': a pear-shaped fruit with short neck and slender stalk. The fruit is small to medium and skin purplish-brown.

'Brown Turkey': broad-pyriform, usually without a neck. The fruit is medium to large and copper-colored. The main crop, begins in mid-July, is large.

'Brunswick': fruits of main crop are oblique-turbinate, mostly without neck. The fruit is of medium size, bronze or purple-brown.

'Marseilles': fruits of main crop round to oblate without a neck and on slender stalks.

#### Figs In the Landscape:

Southern Living Magazine says that, in addition to being a delicious fruit, figs make beautiful trees in the "Middle, Lower, Coastal, and Tropical South". Figs are versatile and easy to grow. They grow the perfect fruit, they love the heat and the insects just seem to ignore them. You will have to share your tree with birds that flock in for a meal and partake of the fruits of your labor. This tree is a birders dream but a fruit pickers nightmare. Netting may be used to discourage fruit damage.

#### Protection From Cold:

Figs just can't stand temperatures that consistently fall below 0 degrees. Still, you can actually get away with growing figs in colder climates if planted against a south-facing wall to benefit from the radiant heat. Figs also grow well and look great when espaliered against a wall.

When temperatures dip below 15 degrees, mulch or cover trees with fabric. Protect the roots of container grown figs by moving them indoors when temperatures fall below 20 degrees.

#### Fig Facts:

##### *Where Do You Plant?:*

Figs require full sun all day to produce edible fruit. Fig trees will shade out anything growing beneath the canopy so nothing needs to be planted under the tree. Fig roots are abundant, traveling far beyond the tree canopy and will invade garden beds.

##### *Pruning and Fertilization:*

Fig trees are productive with or without heavy pruning. It is essential only during the initial years. Trees should be trained with a low crown for fig collection. Since the crop is borne on terminals of previous year's wood, once the tree form is established, avoid heavy winter pruning, which causes loss of the following year's crop. It is better to prune immediately after the main crop is harvested, or with late-ripening cultivars, summer prune half the branches and prune the remainder the following summer.

Regular fertilizing of figs is usually necessary only for potted trees or when they are grown on sands. Excess nitrogen encourages foliage growth at the expense of fruit production. Any fruit that is produced often ripens improperly. Fertilize a fig tree if the branches grew less than a foot the previous year. Apply a total of 1/2 - 1 pound of actual nitrogen, divided into three or four applications beginning in late winter or early spring and ending in July.

##### *Pests From Perdue University:*

Fig trees are prone to attack by nematodes and, in the tropics, have been traditionally planted close to a wall or building so that the roots can go underneath and escape damage. A heavy mulch will serve equally well. Today, control is possible with proper application of nematicides. A common and widespread problem is leaf rust caused by *Cerotelium fici*; bringing about premature leaf fall and reducing yields. It is most prevalent in rainy seasons. Leaf spot results from infection by *Cylindrocladium scoparium* or *Cercospora fici*. Fig mosaic is caused by a virus and is incurable. Affected trees must be destroyed.

#### Suggested Reading

- [Fig Trees and Archaeology](#)
- [100 Common Trees](#)
- [Common Fig Biology](#)

#### Elsewhere on the Web

#### Related Articles

- [Fig Trees - Early Domestication of Fig Trees](#)
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