

June 14, 2009

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It's prime fig picking time

Pick right, store right for best tasting fruit.

Georgians may have to wait a year to pick fresh Georgia strawberries and blueberries, but if figs suit your fancy, it's prime picking time.

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Photo: Courtesy Dr. Mark Rieger, UGA CAES

If figs are among your favorite fruits, a home garden fig tree can provide an abundant supply. If your tree produces too many for your family, freeze them for future enjoyment.

By Sharon Omahen
University of Georgia

Georgians may have to wait a year to pick fresh Georgia strawberries and blueberries, but if figs suit your fancy, it's prime picking time.

"Figs are one of the earliest fruits cultivated by man," said C. B. Christian, fig lover and northeast director of the Georgia Master Gardeners Association. "In Georgia, the prime harvesting season for fresh figs is mid-June to mid-October, so we're in the heart of the season."

Pick when ripe

If you share Christian's love of figs, he offers the following harvesting tips to ensure the best-tasting fruit.

"Figs must be picked ripe from the tree, as they don't ripen well

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SOURCES

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RELATED WEB SITES

- [UGA Fig Information Website](#)
- [UGA Horticulture Dept. Fruit Information Website](#)

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- [Figslr.jpg](#)

once picked," he said. "A very firm fig is not ripe and will not properly ripen further."

On the downside, figs have a very short shelf life, he said. You should eat or freeze them within seven to 10 days of harvesting.

"In most cases, this means you have about three days at most to use them at home," Christian said.

Members of the genus *Ficus* and the family *Moraceae* (the mulberry family), figs can be used in a variety of ways, from preserves to deserts.

Freezing tips

Georgia Master Gardener Dick Whelan freezes his figs for year-round enjoyment.

"This is prime fig time, so today I have too many to eat. So I wash them, towel them dry and store them in the freezer in zip-locked bags," he said. "Now, when I want figs in the morning, I take out a couple and let them defrost while I'm preparing the rest of my breakfast. This way I can enjoy fresh figs all fall."

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension specialist Judy Harrison recommends tray packing when freezing figs. To tray pack, place clean figs on a tray and then place the tray in the freezer.

"Once they're frozen, you can store them together in bags in the freezer," Harrison said. "This way the figs don't stick together and you can easily defrost them two or three at a time."

Harrison also recommends treating the figs with ascorbic acid to prevent them from losing their fresh color.

To treat figs, dissolve three-fourths of a teaspoon of ascorbic acid in 3 tablespoons of water. Sprinkle the mixture over 1 quart of figs before tray packing.

"You can also use an antidarkening treatment like Fruit Fresh or other commercial brands," she said. "Just follow the package directions."

Canning and preserving recipes and safe storage tips for figs and other fresh fruits and vegetables can be found at the [National Center for Home Food Preservation's](http://www.homefoodpreservation.com) Web site (www.homefoodpreservation.com).

Add a fig tree to your landscape

If you'd like to add a fig tree to your home landscape, UGA Extension experts warn that only a few varieties are well-adapted to Georgia.

If you live in the mountains, select a protected site and try Celeste or Hardy Chicago. Some varieties such as Brown Turkey will produce some figs on the current season's growth after being killed to the ground by a freeze.

In Georgia's piedmont, Celeste, Hardy Chicago and Conadria are fairly well-adapted. South of the fall line, many varieties can be grown, but Celeste and Conadria are two of the best. If you want to extend the season with a late-ripening variety, plant Alma.

There is considerable confusion about fig variety names, so UGA Extension specialists recommend ordering plants only from reputable nurseries in the Southeast.

Make sure the variety you select is suited for Georgia's climate. Never buy or try to grow the kinds of figs grown in California. UGA experts say they require pollination by a tiny wasp that can't survive in Georgia's climate.

The fig varieties recommended for Georgia are the common ones that produce only female flowers and set fruit without cross-pollination.

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