

Figs T

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Figs will grow successfully outside in cooler climates if given any necessary winter protection and by selecting hardier cultivars. Their attractive, lobed leaves and delicious fruit make them a superb choice for a sunny, sheltered location in any garden.

Site and soil

Choose a warm, sunny site, such as a south- or south-west-facing wall or fence, and train the fig as a fan. As figs can become large plants they can be used to cover large areas - they will eventually reach about 2m (6.5ft) high and 3–3.5m (10–12ft) wide. Plant 20cm (8in) away from the wall, in spring.

Alternatively, a sun-drenched patio is perfect for growing a fig in a container.

The soil should be well drained, although figs aren't too fussy about its quality, tending to thrive in chalky conditions.

Figs can also be grown in a heated greenhouse, where you can expect a flush of two or even three crops during summer. Due to the cost of heating and excessive watering it is not a practical or an environmentally-friendly proposition for most people.

To encourage figs to bear crops it's a good idea to restrict their root growth; by restricting the plant's leafy growth, the plant will produce more fruit. You can do this by: creating a planting pit; growing the plant in a container; and plunging a container into the ground. Figs grown in a pot can be moved before winter arrives into an unheated greenhouse, shed or porch for protection.

Buying and planting

One of the advantages of figs is that you don't have to worry about pollination as the fruit develops without fertilisation.

To prepare a planting pit, dig a hole 60x60x60cm (2x2x2ft). Line the sides of the holes with patio slabs, setting them 2.5cm (1in) proud of the ground to prevent the roots from spreading over the top of the soil. Leave the bottom unlined, but add a layer of rubble or broken bricks and corks to 10–15cm (4–6in) deep, to prevent roots penetrating the soil underneath. Backfill the hole using garden soil, improved with compost if necessary, or a loam-based potting compost.

Spring is the best time for potting up a fig plant. Start off the plant in a 25cm (10in) container, and as the plant grows pot it up each year, with it eventually ending up in a 45cm (18in) pot. Use a container with plenty of good drainage.

If you want to plunge a containerised fig into open ground, fill a 30–40cm (12–16in) pot with a mix of John Innes No 3 and soil. Then position the pot well into the ground.

[Find out more about growing figs in containers](#)

Plant care

In spring, apply a general-purpose granular feed. Then mulch around the base of the plant with well-rotted manure or compost, to help to retain moisture and suppress weeds. During the growing period apply a liquid tomato fertiliser every two to three weeks until the figs start to ripen.

Give figs plenty of water – probably every day during summer.

Except for the warmest of sites, protect fig plants during the colder months. In autumn, move plants that have been grown in pots into an unheated greenhouse, and return them back outside in late spring. Pack a fan-trained plant with straw, bracken, or even bubble wrap and then cover with horticultural fleece. Remove the insulation gradually during late spring.

Dig around the outside of a planting pit every couple of years with a sharp spade to ensure that no roots have escaped.

Training & pruning

Beware of getting fig sap on your skin – it is an irritant. Wear protective gloves and start pruning from the bottom of the plant and work upwards.

[Find out about pruning figs](#)

[Find out how best to prune container-grown figs](#)

Recommended cultivars

'Brown Turkey'

The most successful fig variety in cool climates in terms of its reliability and popularity. This midseason variety produces a profusion of large, pear-shaped, dark-skinned fruits with a dark red flesh.

'Brunswick'

Another very popular fig variety for outside culture in cool areas due to its hardiness. Midseason 'Brunswick' bears large fruits with yellowish green skin and reddish flesh.

'Rouge de Bordeaux'

One of the finest tasting figs available but needs a very warm, sheltered site to ripen properly. Otherwise, grow in a conservatory or greenhouse. This variety has a deep purple skin with red flesh.

'White Marseilles', syn. 'White Genoa'

Not as well known as it should be, midseason 'White Marseilles' has attractive, pale green to white skin with pale, almost translucent flesh. It is a good variety for growing outdoors.

Harvesting

Cover the plant with a net as harvest time approaches – otherwise birds, particularly blackbirds, will get to the crop first.

Figs are ready for harvesting when their skin is soft, sometimes split, and hanging limply from the branch. Occasionally a tear of sugary liquid is secreted from the eye of the fig. When ready, pick and eat them raw, straight away. Otherwise, store the fruit in a dry, cool place, where it will keep fresh for a few days. Figs can also be preserved by drying them on trays in the airing cupboard, turning them once a day for a week.

Pests and diseases

Figs grown outdoors are rarely troubled by pests and diseases, although birds can be a nuisance at harvesting time.

Coral spot sometimes infects the branches.

Red spider mite and **brown scale** may occur on figs grown in conservatories or greenhouses.