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Figs: FAQs

Sweet and Fragile Summer Fruit



When are fresh figs in season?

Fresh figs first usually appear in New York produce markets in late June with a season that lasts through early fall. The first to arrive are Black Mission figs and green Kadota figs follow with a shorter season, from late July to late September. Dried figs are available year-round.

How do I know a fig is ripe?

Figs do not ripen after they're picked so they must be at their peak when harvested. This makes them particularly fragile and vulnerable to bruises and damage. Usually when figs are sold at a fruit stand or produce market, they're ready to eat. When buying, look for figs that are tender to the touch and have a sweet fragrance. Touch each before you buy to make sure they haven't become too soft, and thus over-ripe.

How do I store figs?

Because they're perishable, try to buy figs only a day or two before you plan to eat them. Fresh figs should be refrigerated but eaten at room temperature. Because they're fragile, handle and store them carefully. Before eating, rinse them with cool water and gently wipe dry.

What's the difference between a green or a black fig?

It's not that simple because there are actually several varieties that come into our stores. The most common is the Black Mission fig which has dark purple skins with a light pink-colored flesh. Calimyrna figs have a yellowish skin with a pale amber flesh. Kadota figs have green skins with a rosy-colored flesh and are less sweet than other varieties. Brown Turkey figs are larger with copper-colored skin and a light pink pulp with few seeds.

How do I cook with figs?

While many think a fresh fig is best eaten raw, their high sugar content make them perfect to stew into a jam consistency and serve with something savory like cheese or cured meats like prosciutto or ham. They also make a winning filling for cookies and other sweets like tarts and fig bars.

Figs are also wonderful with cooked meats like duck, other poultry, and pork. We've added a link to a recipe from *Gourmet* magazine for "Roast Quail with Fresh Figs" (see below).

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What do I do with fresh figs I want to eat raw?

First of all, do not peel a fig. The skin is tender and flavorful so just trim off the tip of the stem and the rest of the fig is wonderfully edible.

A fresh Kadota fig is perfect with a piece of mildly aged goat cheese. The sweetness of the fig is an ideal counterbalance to the tang and the crumbly texture of a chevre. They can also be sliced and added to a fennel and arugula salad. Other ways are to eat them for breakfast, sliced with cereal or yogurt.

What's the nutritional info on figs?

Rich in fiber, potassium and manganese, a single fig (about 2 1/2" in diameter) has about 50 calories. They're also a fruit source of calcium.

But they're also one of a small number of foods that naturally contain a substance called *oxalates* which when crystallized, can contribute to kidney stones and gallbladder problems. If you're prone to such health problems, you should check with your doctor before eating figs.

Where do figs originate from?

Some may say the Garden of Eden given Adam and Eve's choice of the fig leaf as an article of clothing. But it's more certain that figs were native to Turkey and were introduced to the New World when the Spanish brought them to Mexico in the 16th century. Mission figs got their name when Franciscan monks brought these dark purple figs to their San Diego-area missions in the late 18th century. Today in the United States, most of our figs are grown in California and in other warm climates including Texas, Georgia and Alabama.

Field Guide to Produce by Aliza Green; *On Food and Cooking* by Harold McGee; *The Cook's Thesaurus*

External Link: [Gourmet's "Roast Quail with Fresh Figs"](#) (link will open in a new window)