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A Fig's Tale

By DAVID KARP, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

August 11, 1999

* Beat egg yolks in large bowl. Add 1/2 cup sugar and beat until lemon yellow in color, 3 to 4 minutes. Add milk, cream and fruit mixture to yolks. Fold in whites and vanilla. Pour into ice cream maker and freeze according to manufacturer's directions.

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About 6 cups. Each 1/2-cup serving: 285 calories; 34 mg sodium; 82 mg cholesterol; 9 grams fat; 50 grams carbohydrates; 3 grams protein; 0.42 gram fiber. Note: Although many recipes call for uncooked eggs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has found them to be a potential carrier of food-borne illness and recommends avoiding raw eggs.

(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX / INFOGRAPHIC)

Fig Varieties

* Adriatic. (White Adriatic) Skin very thin, green to yellowish green; pulp strawberry. Imported to California in 1850s, most widely grown variety 1885-1945. Has excellent flavor when fresh but rarely sold fresh today (too delicate); mostly sold for fig paste. A disappearing variety because of low prices; being replaced by two other Adriatic varieties, Conadria and Tena. The various Adriatic types make up 34% of dried crop.

* Brown Turkey. (San Piero). Large; skin purplish-brown with greenish shades on neck; pulp amber to light strawberry; flavor bland. Introduced 1850s, most important fig variety grown in Southern California (different from Eastern Brown Turkey, which is grown in Eastern U.S. and Europe). Fresh market only (5% of fresh crop).

* Calimyrna (in Turkey, called Sari Lop or Lop Incir). Large; skin light yellow-green to golden yellow; pulp amber to light strawberry; fresh flavor good, very sweet; the standard of excellence for whole dried figs. Best-known of Smyrna figs, which require caprification to bear fruit. Grown in Meander (Menderes) Valley of Turkey for centuries; introduced to California 1880, first successful crop 1899. 50% of fresh fig crop, 38% of dried.

* Caprifig. Skin green or purple; interior white or purplish; pulp rough and dry. The name, which means "goat fig," bespeaks its inedibility. Hosts the fig wasp, *Blastophaga psenes*, which pollinates Calimyrnas.

* Conadria. Skin light yellowish-green; pulp light lavender; flavor very good when fresh. Hybrid of Adriatic and a caprifig, bred by Ira Condit, fig expert known as "High Priest of the Fig"; introduced 1955. Resembles Adriatic but has lighter color, sweeter. Mostly dried and used for fig paste.

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