

# IS A FIG IN YOUR FUTURE?

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By Ralph E. Mitchell

While maybe you are more apt to have citrus, mangos, avocados, and lychees in your backyard fruit grove, you may want to also consider adding a fig tree (a relative of the mulberry family) to your collection. Forming more of a large bush than a tree here in Florida, figs easily fit into the home landscape. If you have never eaten homegrown figs, you will be in for a treat!

Grown originally in the Old World tropics, Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, figs can also grow in our area. The well-known three to five lobed rough green leaves cover the somewhat irregularly-shaped deciduous tree in season. The fig fruit is actually a hollow, fleshy fruit stem. While there are several types of figs, only what is known as the common type is suitable for Florida. The other types have special pollination requirements that would make fruit production very difficult or impossible in our region. Container grown plants do best when set out in the early spring in well-drained soil in full sun. Figs don't like wet soil, but do need sufficient moisture during the fruiting season.

Figs suitable for Florida have certain preferred characteristics. First, they should have a closed eye. The eye in this case is the opening (it sort of reminds you of a belly-button) at one end of the fruit that if too large can allow water and insect entry and potential subsequent damage. A closed eye will keep these issues out. A long stem also allows the fruit to droop which again keeps moisture out. Green skin is also preferred because birds are more attracted to feeding on dark-colored fruit. Last, but not least, a fig grafted on a nematode resistant rootstock, if available, is recommended. One additional side item of interest - the latex produced by figs can cause

dermatitis on your skin. Wear gloves when working with the plant or harvesting the fruit.

There are several common fig cultivars best suited for our area which are generally available at local garden centers. Celeste, also known as Celestial, Blue Celeste, Little Brown and Sugar, is small, purplish-bronze in color, and is ripe from mid-July to mid-August. Celeste is also a good choice because it has a closed eye. Brown Turkey is another popular variety. The fruit is medium in size, has a medium eye opening, and is ready to harvest from the end of July through the fall. You may also find this cultivar listed as Everbearing, Harrison, Ramsey, Lee's Perpetual, Eastern Brown Turkey and Brunswick. Sometimes available is Green Ischia which is green in color and has a closed eye - both desirable traits. Also look for this variety under the names Ischia Green, White Ischia, and Ischia Verte.

One of the biggest problems with figs is feeding damage caused by birds. Try to select light-colored fruiting varieties or pick the ripe fruit early in the day before the birds can get to it. Bird netting is also an option. A disease called fig rust is another very common problem. I have had figs with this fungus which causes leaves to turn rusty brown and deformed. Premature defoliation can also occur. Use a Bordeaux spray as per label directions (please read the label) which will generally indicate an application every two to three weeks from June to August on the underside of the leaves. Nematodes are also a common problem that causes damage to figs. Selecting a fig with a grafted, nematode-resistant rootstock will go a long way towards protection.

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Try growing this unique and tasty seasonal fruit in your own backyard. Again, there is nothing like a fresh fig from your own tree! For more information on all types of fruit plants suitable for our area, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden** every Thursday 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 10:00am-1:00pm every Thursday.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Extension Service. You may contact him by email ([Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com)). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email ([Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com)).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

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*Resource:*

*Crocker, T. E. (2003) The Fig. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.*

*King, M. (2007) Florida Food Fare - Figs. The University of Florida Extension, IFAS, Sarasota County Extension.*