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## Garden Q.&A.

By Leslie Land  
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### Figs Show Toughness

Q. I have been reading about the health benefits of figs and remembered that when I was a child, my grandmother had a fig tree in her garden, which she would cover with cheesecloth as the fruit ripened to keep the birds away. I would like to try to grow one myself, but I don't know how to begin.

A. Figs are native to the Mediterranean area and do best where there is no frost. So the best way to begin is by living in a warm climate.

Failing that, think protection. Fig lovers in colder climates have developed antifreeze strategies that enable outdoor cultivation as far north as New York or even Boston. They plant hardy varieties -- Brown Turkey or Desert King -- in warm, protected corners. For winter, they either swaddle them in multiple layers of insulation or -- I am not making this up -- dig trenches beside the trees, which may be 12 to 15 feet tall, loosen the roots and then lay the trees on their sides in the trenches and pile big mounds of soil over them. In the spring, the trees are exhumed and set upright in time to bloom and bear summer fruit.

Figs are tough, in other words, and trees that have been frozen back but not killed often produce crops the next season. They also perform well in large pots. Set them outside in summer, and then bring them in for winter to a damp cellar or a garage where temperatures remain cold but don't go below freezing.

Ken Durio, whose family-owned Louisiana Nursery offers 40 varieties of figs, recommends Magnolia for pot culture. It's quite hardy, bears tasty fruit and has large, deeply lobed leaves that make it worth growing as an ornamental. He also suggests L.S.U. Purple, which is slow to mature but can eventually bear as many as three crops a year.

The Durio's nursery also offers three hardy varieties -- Schar Amber, Schar Israel and Schar Italian -- named after a friend who patrols the New York area searching for and taking cuttings from fig trees thriving in abandoned lots.

Louisiana Nursery is at 5853 Highway 182, Opelousas, La. 70570; telephone, (318) 948-3696; its next fruit catalogue will be ready in about two months and will cost \$4. Another source for fig trees is Raintree Nursery, 391 Butts Road, Morton, Wash. 98356; (360) 496-6400; free catalogue.

### A Calla Experiment

Q. I simply love our callas, but soon my husband will have to pull them out and store them in the

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warm enough that we can just leave them in the ground. They are near a corner of the house, protected from both north and west winds.

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A. Zantedeschias, popularly known as callas or calla lilies, are natives of South Africa and can be left in the ground only where they are safe from frost and where cold temperatures are fleeting. Though the large, white-flowered Z. aethiopica Green Goddess is reputedly somewhat tougher than the spotted-leaved hybrids with colored flowers, all of them are better suited to Los Angeles than to Philadelphia.

If your protected corner is very unusual -- warmed by proximity to the basement, for instance -- you could try leaving a couple of plants in the ground and piling an enormous heap of insulating mulch (leaves, straw, old mattresses) over an area large enough to keep the soil they are in from freezing. This would probably be more work than pulling them out, and then you would have to look at that mulch pile. But it's worth a try; if it doesn't work, you're not out much. At the worst, you'll have an excuse to try a few new ones.

Sources for Zantedeschias include Van Bourgondien Brothers, P.O. Box 1000, Babylon, N.Y. 11702; (800) 622-9997, which has Z. aethiopica, and Wayside Gardens, 1 Garden Lane, Hodges, S.C. 29695; (800) 845-1124. Both offer free catalogues.

Address questions to Garden Q.& A., The New York Times, 229 West 43d Street, New York 10036, or to gardening@nytimes.com for E-mail. Those of general interest will be published. Unpublished questions cannot be answered individually.

Illustration: The Magnolia fig does well grown in pots. (Frank Riccio)

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