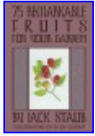




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robbers, and the Serbs introduce a stick of Elder into their wedding ceremonies to bring good luck.” In Celtic lore, *Eld* was the land of the fairies, and it was believed that if one sat beneath an elder tree on Midsummer’s Eve, one would see the miracle of the Fairy King passing. Elder also constituted an antique herbal remedy of significant note, being known throughout much of early history as “the medicine chest of the common man.” For instance, in parts of medieval Europe, it was believed that elder could cure rheumatism, a belief manifested by lashing elder twig hoops to the body parts in question, and, in other cultures, it was believed that water taken from a malade’s bath and sprinkled on the roots of an elder tree would transmit the illness to the accommodating plant. Modern herbalists use the flowers and fruits of the elder for infusions for such diverse maladies as fever, headache, cold, rheumatism, and consumption.

There are many beautiful varieties of elder, all offering frothy white to pink blossoms and leaf colorations running from regulation green to yellow and purple, with a good number of interesting variegations and pretty marginations in between. ‘Black Beauty,’ introduced from England in 2002, is the reigning purple-leafed darling, boasting extremely ornamental black/purple foliage, its leaves actually becoming darker as the season progresses. Tiny flowers form huge, deep pink, headily lemon-scented blossoms, followed by clusters of glossy, dramatically dark purple berries in late summer. ‘Black Beauty,’ being hardy to USDA zone 4, is, like most elders, a wonderfully adaptive and uncompaining shrub, although like certain other elderberries, will also require a second cultivar as companion in order to set the best fruit. The concoction of some tasty elderflower cordial of a summer weekend would be an excellent exercise for this dusky garden stunner. Pour 6 pints of boiling water over 2 pounds of sugar, stir till dissolved, and then, when cooled, add 2 sliced oranges, 3 sliced lemons, a packet of citric acid, and 30 elderflower heads. Let steep in a cool place for a day, and then strain into a bottle and enjoy on a sultry summer evening.

❧ 28. Fig 'Hardy Chicago' ❧  
 29. Fig 'Petite Negra'  
*Ficus carica*

*In 528 B.C., Siddhartha Gautama attained true enlightenment and founded Buddhism while sitting under a fig tree.*

**A**s every art historian knows, remove a fig leaf and uncover something sensational. Botanically, the edible fig may constitute the most remarkable form of fruit on earth, as it is not actually a fruit at all, but a hollow receptacle entirely lined with tiny flowers, which, in total darkness, manage to bloom and ripen seeds: that ruby or emerald flesh of which so many cultures have been so fond is actually a miniature (and nearly divine) interior carpet of spent blossoms! Both the Assyrians and ancient Sumerians adored the fig as long ago as 2900 B.C., and figs were known in Crete by 1600 B.C., the early Greeks prizing them so highly that, in the original Olympic Games, it was a fig leaf wreath rather than a laurel that crowned the victors. In 717 B.C., Romulus and Remus, the fraternal founders of Rome, were said to be suckled by a she-wolf in the shade of an accommodating fig tree.

Figs also figured prominently in the *Odyssey*, as Homer narrates the agonies of Tantalus in the underworld: "Trees spread their foliage high over the pool and dangle fruits above his head . . . sweet figs and luxuriant olives," as well as in the Bible, as in this passage from Numbers 20:5 concerning the flight of the children of Israel: "And why have you made

us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs . . .” Fig poultices also rated a mention in the Bible, Isaiah 38:21 reporting: “Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover,” and it is also known that Xerxes, king of Persia from 485 to 465 B.C., consumed Attic figs in quantity as a daily reminder of the wisdom of conquering a country that could produce something so exquisite.

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**FIG 'HARDY CHICAGO'**









































































































































































































































































































