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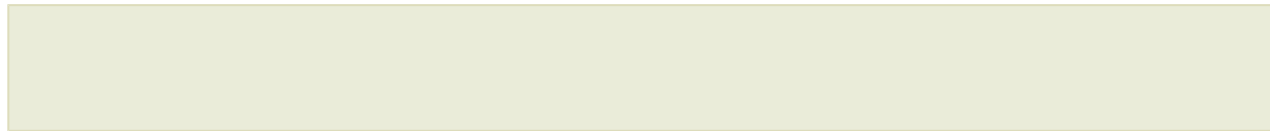
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## Rich in history and rich in fruit

Laramie Treviño, Special to The Chronicle

Saturday, January 8, 2005



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TRANSP

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**While today's athletes eat goo when preparing for competitions, Olympians in the early days chose figs as their gooey training food.**

Images



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Plant of the Week

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The fruit, regarded as sacred and honorable by the Greeks and Romans, so it is said, was offered as an honor to the first medal winners of the Games.

And figs, members of the 'Moraceae' family, which has about 1,000 species, are still champions on the produce circuit.

Believed to be natives of Asia, figs were introduced to California in the 1750s by Spanish missionaries who

planted them at the missions they established

throughout the state. California's leading fig -- the black Mission -- takes its name from its origins.

The fruit we know as the fig is actually a flower inverted into itself. Researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture describe the fig as having stems and leaves full of milky sap and fleshy masses with an opening at the end. Hundreds of flowerets that later change into the fruits grow on the walls of this round mass.

"The inside-out refers to the inverted inflorescence (flowers that are borne inside the receptacle called a syconium), which is a false fruit," said Malli K. Aradhya, a

geneticist with the USDA.

Most commercially grown figs belong to a group that produces crops without pollination, Aradhya said. Common varieties include 'Mission,' 'Kadota,' 'Brown Turkey,' 'Col de Dame,' 'Violette de Bordeaux' and 'Panachee,' also called a variegated fig or 'Tiger Stripe' because of its two-tone green coloring.

Propagation: A fig tree can be started from a footlong piece of dormant wood less than 1 inch wide stuck into the ground or into a pot. Cuttings can be dipped in a rooting hormone and allowed to callus one week in a moist spot at 50 to 60 degrees.

"What they like is bottom heat and the top cool," said Howard Garrison, the fig crop manager at the USDA repository in Winters (Yolo County), where 140 varieties of figs are grown.

The California Rare Fruit Growers fig guide warns against transplanting or disturbing a young tree while it is starting new growth in the spring because that action may kill it. Trees should be cut back to 2 feet when planted and the trunk painted white.

Figs require full sun. The varieties that do well in coastal climates include 'Desert King' (large, green-white skin with strawberry flesh), 'Excell' (greenish-yellow-



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skinned hybrid with amber pulp), 'Green Ischia' (greenish skin with violet-red pulp), 'Osborne Prolific' (large fruit with purple-brown skin, amber pulp), 'White Adriatic' (greenish-yellow skin, light- strawberry pulp), 'White Genoa' (green-yellow skin and yellow or pink pulp) and 'White Marseilles' (green-yellow with honey-colored flesh).

**Harvest:** Identifying a ripe fig can invoke specters from the pages of a Wild West or mystery novel.

"Look for the hangman's neck and for the torn cloak," advised Jeff Moersfelder, a crop manager at the USDA's collection site in Winters. A droopy stem on the fruit is a sign of maturity, as is the concentrated texture on the skin that drapes as figs start to lose moisture.

"A lot of figs are best when they start to dry on the tree and they begin looking like a cloak," said Garrison. A "tear in the eye" or the stage when the sugary substance of the interior fruit shines through the hole at the base of the fig is another indicator of readiness. However, some figs have "closed" eyes. Figs must be harvested when fully ripe on the tree because they will not ripen if picked immature.

**Availability:** Dormant fig hardwood of many varieties will be available at the

bankruptcy

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## REAL ESTATE



### Architects transform Mill Valley house

Fred Quezada had an inkling that if his wife, Cecilia, visited Mill Valley, their life would change dramatically.

January scion exchanges of the California Rare Fruit Growers association and Mendocino Permaculture (see schedules listed on Page F7). Grafting demonstrations and tastings often are part of the program. Some chapters charge a nominal fee or request donations at the door. To locate chapters near you, visit [www.crfg.org](http://www.crfg.org).

Season extenders: Figs can dry in the sun in four to five days or overnight in a dehydrator. Find recipes by visiting the California Fig Advisory Board Web site at [www.californiafigs.com](http://www.californiafigs.com).

Scion exchanges: Here are dates of upcoming events of the California Rare Fruit Growers Inc. and Mendocino Permaculture. Data is subject to change. Call contact telephone numbers for updated information.

-- Golden Gate chapter; noon to 3 p.m. Jan. 15, 1700 Oak Park Blvd., Pleasant Hill, (510) 843-1657.

-- Santa Clara County chapter; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Jan. 15, at Prusch Farm Park, 647 S. King Road, San Jose, (408) 733-5317.

-- Monterey Bay chapter; 1 p.m. Jan. 16, UC Santa Cruz Arboretum meeting room, 1156 High St., Santa Cruz, (831) 427-2998.

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Michael Van Gorkom was laid off by Yahoo in late April. He didn't panic. He didn't rush off to a therapist. Instead, the 33-year old Santa Monica resident discovered that being jobless "kind of settled nicely."

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-- Sacramento chapter; Jan. 16, site to be confirmed; for times and additional information, call (530) 666-7182.

-- Redwood Empire chapter; 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 22, Sebastopol Veterans Memorial Hall, 282 High St., Sebastopol, (707) 537-8723.

-- Anderson Valley scion exchange: Mendocino Permaculture will host its annual Winter Abundance Workshop/Scion Exchange from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 5 at Anderson Valley High School, 18200 Mountain View Road, Boonville. Free. Scion wood from rare varieties of figs as well as from other fruit will be available. For more information, call (707) 462-7843 or (707) 895-3897.

*Menlo Park writer Laramie Treviño is a master gardener with the University of California Cooperative Extension and a garden manager with the peninsula-based Collective Roots Garden Project. E-mail her at [home@sfchronicle.com](mailto:home@sfchronicle.com).*

*This article appeared on page F - 5 of the San Francisco Chronicle*

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