

Different Shades of Green

Amargia is a loose association of people with various types of physical limitations and able-bodied individuals. Our primary goal is to teach that living in a rural environment is a viable option for people with physical limitations. So many believe that a disability automatically confines one to live in an urban environment.

Sunday, February 15, 2009

Beginners Guide to Figs

Amargia's Plants

Ficus carica (Edible Fig)

Confessions of a Fig Monkey: or



Figs in the Deep South:

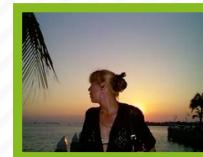
Where have all the fig trees gone? When I was young, it seemed like everyone who had a yard had, at least, one fig tree. I actually checked to see if some strange epidemic struck down the fig trees on the Gulf Coast while I was away But, the fig tree in the backyard

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About Me



Amargia
Amargia is a group of variously disabled people, but we do not discriminate against T.A.P's. (Temporarily Able-bodied Persons) Disability is an experience you will have if you live long enough.) Kay (blind) uses the abbreviation L.D. (Light Dependent) and thinks it quite amazing what L.D.'s can accomplish considering

of my childhood home was still thriving after 40 years. Then, I suspected it was one of those garden or food fashion trends. Maybe figs were just out of style. But, figs are like our wide brimmed straw hats. They are a southern garden classic. Not, a fad. Finally, I realized it is because yards are so much smaller now. With a height that can reach more than 30 feet and a tendency to spread, the fig variety so common here in my youth is not a tree for small spaces. What figs are still around, have been trained to bush form. If the sprawling behemoths I remember are being phased out, I am among the last of a dying breed. There will be no more fig monkeys.

Fig trees have weak, flexible wood. We fig monkeys were those older children, typically tall and slender, who made extra money in the summer harvesting the "fruit"*. The extinction of fig monkeys is probably for the best. It really was not fair to older people, the altitude challenged and the more statuesque. Fig bushes make it possible for all to enjoy the ultimate reward of being a fig monkey. Not the money we received for our labors, but those rare treasures, perfectly ripe figs We fig monkeys claimed these jewels for ourselves. They actually were the color of gems. Citrine and peridot, near the stem. A combination of brown topaz and garnet over the main body. And, sometimes, flashes of amethyst and an iridescent blue near the apex. While they were the hue of semi-precious stones, they were as delicate as soap bubbles. If we had put these precious things into the common pail, they would have been mush before they reached the kitchen. Crushed by their jam quality sisters. While you do not have to be a fig monkey these days to get the perfect fig, you do still need your own tree.

Amargia was recently given a new fig tree. It was an offshoot from a neighbor's healthy, productive tree. This is the ideal way to acquire a fig. If you are not so fortunate as to have a generous neighbor who has a tree, finding the right variety of fig can be a challenge. Here is some information I think you will find helpful.

There are four general types of edible figs. The one of greatest interest to southern gardeners is the common fig. It is best, however, to know about the other types to avoid confusion.

Common or Persistent Fig: All the flowers of the common fig are female and need no pollinizer* or pollinator* for fruit development. Brown Turkey, Black Mission, Blue Celeste and Brunswick are all of this type.

Caprifigs: Wild figs that are usually not very palatable, but are used

their limitations.

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as pollinators for other figs. Caprifigs have male and female flowers. They need a particular kind of wasp for pollinization. Without this tiny wasp fruit will not develop properly

Smyrna figs: This type requires caprifigs for cross-pollination, if the fruit is to develop as it should.

San Pedro type or Intermediate Figs: Figs can produce two crops a year. The smaller, early crop produced on last year's wood is called the "breba crop." The more abundant, later harvest is referred to as the "main crop." The San Pedro fig type can produce a breba crop without pollination, but needs it for the main crop.

Growing Figs:

Take time to choose the best variety for your area and for how you want to use the harvest. You will save yourself time, money and frustration in the long run. Keep in mind that figs and citrus do not make good neighbors when selecting a place for your new fig in the landscape. Figs are not demanding once established. If nature does not provide, give them a deep watering every two weeks while actively growing. Fertilize with a balanced formula containing micronutrients (6-6-6, is good) if growth seems too slow. A site with good general overview on fig cultivation is the [DIY](#) site.

If you keep in mind the article is written by a west coast grower, a good introduction to cultivating figs can be found at [From Twigs to Figs](#) He has years of hands-on experience and gives details on propagating figs from scion wood. Nice photos, too. (Or, so I am told by my L.D. associates.)

Southerners need a fig variety that is self-pollinating with fruit having a "closed eye."

Meaning, there is only the tiniest opening at the fruit's apex Some varieties recommended for the southeast are Celeste (a.k.a. "honey fig, Sugar fig"), Texas Ever bearing, Blanche (a.k.a. "Lemon" or "Marseille"), Alma (a late ripening variety), NC Dark and LSU Purple.

The very best source for information on growing figs in the south is found at: [ACES Publications](#) You will find a longer list of tested varieties there.

A list of varieties suited for more northern climates can be found at: [Trees of Joy](#).

For containers, you might want to seek out dwarf cultivars or those that are by nature slow growing. Figs grown in containers will need to be root prune. By choosing dwarf or slow growing varieties, you will not have to perform this messy task as often. Remember that while the tree likes 8 hours of sun, the soil in a container can over heat and dry out too quickly. Create some sort of skirting for your pot, if this is a problem.

Two sources for dwarf figs are: [Gurneys Seed & Nursery Co.](#) And, [Edible Landscaping](#). (This link will take you to the "Plant Search" page. Enter "fig" in the box.)

If you plan to espalier your fig, containers are very definitely the way to go.

Figs grown in the ground have an extensive root system that can extend well beyond the canopy. A site with information on growing figs in containers is: [UC Davis.edu](#)

You now know about the greed of fig monkeys. You should also be aware that some people find the rough, furry texture of fig leaves unpleasant. And, there are many who have an allergy to the tree's sap. Knowing all these things, I am sure you can see why it is best to keep your fig at a size that will make it easy to harvest .. For instructions on how to prune. Check out [Brians Garden](#).

An article on pruning figs is also available from the Cooperative Extension Services of [Perdue University](#).

Two internet sources for figs are: [Willis Orchards Co](#) and [Edible Landscaping](#), mentioned above, also stocks standard size figs. .

I have a particular fascination for those plants that have played major roles in human history. I would place the fig in that category. It appears to have been one of the first plants humans learned to cultivate. The symbolic meanings to be found in the story of Adam and Eve being cast from the Garden of Eden may be debated. It can not be argued, however, that it is superficially the story of humanity's move from a simple gatherer's existence to agriculture. The fig is employed as symbol and metaphor by the Biblical writers from Genesis to Revelations. And later, used in much the same way in the Qur'an. For more about the fascinating history of the fig, see

the Wikipedia entry for "Common Fig."

It is tea time for the elephants who live alongside our road. We hope that by

serving them our special Green Elephant Tea blend, we can keep them from taking over the front yard. .

Elephant grass, giant cane, wild cane, Spanish cane, sea cane..... Arundo donax has many common names. In those parts



of the world such as ours, where it is highly invasive, many of those names should not be repeated in

polite society, It is a plant with many practical and craft uses. In the autumn, with its tawny panicles swaying in the breeze, it is quite pretty. Its negative traits unfortunately over shadow its positive aspects. It has an unbelievably fast growth rate and is very hard to get rid of once established. The labor involved in digging it up is back breaking.

We are trying something different this year. Digging only enough to expose the roots and pouring boiling water with a little vinegar added over the roots.. It turns out the perfect vessels for heating and carrying the water to where it is needed are teapots.

Footnotes:

*"Fruit"-Figs are a "false fruit." What we refer to as the fruit is actually the container for the tiny "true fruit."

*Pollinator and *pollenizer--You will often see and hear these two words confused. I've done it myself. But, officially, "pollinator" is the right word to refer to a

source of pollen.

While, "pollenizer" is the correct word for the method by which pollen is spread. (Wind, insects, etc.)

*Posted by Amargia
at 7:41 PM*

*Labels: [Beginners
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