



FIGS AND THEIR PROPAGATION

One of the easiest plants to grow here in East Texas is the fig. Not only is it a lovely landscape feature for the spring, summer, and fall, but also the fruit is delicious to eat right off the branch and can be made into preserves to use all the rest of the year.

The outer wall of the fig "fruit" is really a specialized stem, and in the cavity, a number of tiny flowers sprout. This is known botanically as a syconium. Propagation is quite easy. It is recommended that eight- to 10-inch pieces from two to three-year-old wood about three quarters of an inch in diameter be cut in winter or early spring.

They can be placed in pots in a warm location, or they can be set out in the ground where they can remain permanently. They will need to be kept moist, but not wet. Figs like good drainage.

They won't do well if the temperature goes below 20 degrees for an extended time. So it would be best to keep them inside for the hard winter and set them out in the spring after freeze danger has past. Mature trees can usually survive but may have some damage that will affect that year's crop.

Figs need plenty of sunlight to have maximum fruit production, and they prefer morning light so as to dry off the leaves.

If there is a special fig tree in your neighborhood, whose fruit you enjoy, this would be a great way to give it new life in your own garden. Just be sure to get permission from the owner.

The Texas Cooperative Extension recommends the following figs for this area: 'Celeste,' which is the most cold hardy, and is very productive. 'Texas Everbearing' is another common, hardy variety with large early fruit. 'Brown Turkey,' which sometimes is confused with 'Texas Everbearing,' has a long ripening season, and is sometimes injured in freezes, but comes back to bearing quickly.

Mary Claire Rowe, Smith County Master Gardener

FIG CAKE RECIPE

So now you have successfully produced a fig crop from the fig trees or shrubs that were discussed last week. In addition to the great-tasting fig preserves, for which recipes abound in various cookbooks, try my favorite method of use of fig fruit in a cake.

2 cups sugar
3/4 cup margarine or butter
4 eggs
1 cup buttermilk
1 tsp soda
2 cups fig preserves
3 cups flour
1 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp cloves
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp vanilla
1 cup pecans (optional)

Cream sugar and margarine; add beaten eggs. Mix soda with buttermilk and add to mixture. Gradually add flour, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon. Add fig preserves, vanilla, and nuts. Bake in lightly greased (Pam) three loaf pans or 13" x 9" pan and one loaf pan. Bake at 300 degrees for one hour. While hot, pour sauce as desired over cake in pan.

Fig Glaze or Sauce

1 cup sugar
1 stick margarine
1 T corn syrup
1-1/2 tsp vanilla
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 tsp soda

Mix and boil for three minutes.

This glaze is enough for several fig cakes. Store it in the refrigerator.

Don Gill, Smith County Master Gardener

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