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Figs - July 2004's Featured Food

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Nutrition Notes

Figs are definitely fibre friendly. One medium fresh fig has 1.4g of dietary fibre, while a serving of 4 medium figs pumps that up to 6.6g. A serving of dried figs has even more fibre at 9.3g, however they have a few more calories as their natural sugars are concentrated.

Generally speaking, fresh figs are low in calories with negligible saturated fat and no cholesterol. Figs also contain some calcium with 18 mg in one medium fig. Remember that every little bit helps - especially if you don't consume dairy products.

Figs contain small amounts of iron, magnesium, folate, vitamin B6, thiamin and niacin. They also provide some lutein and zeaxanthin to help keep your eyes healthy!

Varieties

Interestingly, the fig is actually a flower that is inverted into itself, although it is considered a fruit. There are hundreds of fig varieties, but only a handful are grown commercially.

The most common varieties grown, dried and packaged for consumer and industrial markets are:

Adriatic: Transplanted from the Mediterranean, this fig is the most prolific of all the varieties. It has a high sugar content that is retained as the fruit dries to a golden shade. It is best for fig bars and pastes.

Brown Turkey: Pear-shaped with violet to brown skin.

Calimyrna: This variety has a delicious nut-like flavour and a tender, golden skin. The Calimyrna is the popular favourite for eating out of hand. This fig is the California version of the Smyrna fig, which was imported by a grower.

Celeste: Medium size and pear-shaped with purple skin and pinkish pulp.

Kadota: This is the American version of the original Italian Dattato fig. It is thick-skinned and has a beautiful creamy amber colour when ripe. Practically seedless, this fig is best for canning



WHY FIGS?

"Figs are restorative. They increase the strength of young people, preserve the elderly in better health and make them look younger with fewer wrinkles" - so said Pliny, the Roman writer (53-113 AD).

Recipes with Figs

- [Cider-Braised Chicken with Figs](#)
- [Fettuccine with Figs & Goat Cheese](#)
- [Figgy Spread](#)
- [Fresh Fig Cake](#)
- [Homemade Fig Bars](#)
- [Mediterranean Fig Kebabs on Mixed Greens](#)
- [Rosemary Fig Confit](#)
- [Thai Chicken Salad with Figs](#)

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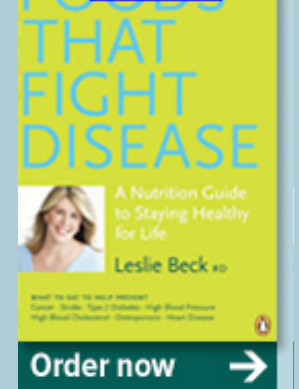


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and preserving as well as drying.

Magnolia: A large fig with a pinkish-yellow flesh and amber skin.

Mission: This fig was named for the mission fathers who planted the fruit as they traveled north along the California coast. It is famous for its distinctive flavour. It is a deep purple shade which darkens to a rich black when dried. You may find fig paste, fig concentrate and fig extract being sold online or in specialty food shops. Figs are also sold candied and canned in sugar syrup or water.

Buying

Figs are harvested in the late summer and early fall, but because they are often dried and packaged, they are available all year long.

For fresh figs, choose ones that are plump and slightly moist-looking. Avoid those with skins that are bruised or broken. Good quality figs should have a mild fragrance. If they smell sour that means they are spoiled. The fruit should be just soft to the touch, but not mushy. Figs that are somewhat shriveled and are starting to dry will be extra sweet.

When buying packages of dried figs, check for unbroken wrapping; the figs should give slightly when gently squeezed through the package. Avoid those that are moldy or sour-smelling.

Storing

If your figs are not quite ripe, place them on a plate at room temperature and turn them frequently. Make sure they are not in direct sunlight. Fresh figs can be stored in a shallow covered container in the refrigerator for no more than 2 to 3 days. Be sure to line the container with paper towels.

Dried figs can be stored at cool room temperature or in the refrigerator. Just be sure that they are well wrapped so that they do not lose their moisture and become hard. Stored properly, dried figs should keep for several months. Dried figs can also be frozen for up to one year. Thaw at room temperature when you're ready to use them.

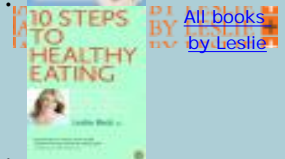
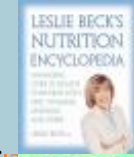
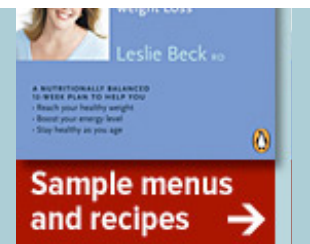
Preparing

For fresh figs, wash and remove the hard portion of the stem end. Cut the fig in halves or quarters.

To make them easier to cut up, put dried figs in the freezer for an hour. You can use a sharp knife or a pair of scissors to cut up dried figs. Run the knife or scissors under hot water when the cutting edge gets sticky.

Thick-skinned Calimyrna figs usually need to be peeled before preparing or eating. Other varieties, such as Mission, do not need to be peeled as they have thinner skins.

Tip: If you're adding chopped figs to a batter or dough, toss the fig pieces with a little flour



first. That way they won't sink to the bottom of the baked good but will remain dispersed throughout.

You can also plump up dried figs by simmering them in boiling water, wine or fruit juice for two minutes. If desired, add a drop of almond extract to complement and enhance their flavour.

Baking: Pierce figs a few times with a fork, and place them in a baking dish or pan. Sprinkle with water, wine or fruit juice to keep them moist. Cook in a 300°F oven for about 20 minutes, or until they are nicely softened.

Eating

The most common and perhaps best way to eat figs is right out of hand. Figs' full flavour and chewy texture make them a tasty, nutritious addition to a healthy diet. Figs are conveniently portable and are thus great for school lunches, snacks on the trail or for a midday energy boost. They can also be made into elegant desserts, rustic breads, baked goods and everything in between.

Did You Know?

- The fig can be dried, roasted, and used as a coffee substitute.
- Figs contain a proteolytic enzyme that is considered an aid to digestion and used by the pharmaceutical industry.

Healthy Ways to Enjoy Figs:

Breakfast

- Add chopped figs to any hot or cold cereal.
- Check your bread machine recipes that call for added fruit. Substitute or add chopped figs when possible.
- Cover figs in a bowl with orange juice or your favourite juice. Refrigerate overnight - this will plump and flavour them to be enjoyed with breakfast.
- Use chopped figs in recipes for quick breads and muffins.
- Purée or finely chop figs and toss into buttermilk pancake batter.
- Toss finely chopped figs into plain or vanilla yogurt. Add a bit of granola for a quick breakfast. Or layer the yogurt and granola to make a breakfast parfait.

Lunch

- Stuff figs with low-fat ricotta cheese and chopped, toasted almonds.
- Slice figs and add to any green salad. Top with an honey-herb vinaigrette.
- Add chopped figs to fruit salads.

- A combination of figs, Swiss cheese and a small amount of smoky bacon make a marvelous quiche perfect for lazy lunches or brunch entertaining.

Dinner

- Toss cooked rice with coarsely chopped figs. Serve with chicken breast or pork tenderloin.
- Skewer figs and other fruit such as bananas and pineapple. Use as a side dish with grilled meats or serve with a sweetened low-fat yogurt dip as a dessert.
- Figs poached in port and served with vanilla frozen yogurt and angel food cake makes a great low-fat way to end a meal.
- Add chopped figs to your favourite salsa or chutney recipe. The sweetness of the figs goes well with the spiciness of the peppers.

Snacks

- Eat figs out of hand for a simple and fiber-rich snack.
- Make trail mix of chopped figs, crunchy wholegrain cereal and pretzel sticks.
- Use fig puree as a fat substitute in cookies and other baked goods.
- Dip dried figs into melted chocolate or lemon-flavored yogurt.


For More Information

- [California Fig Advisory Board](#)
- [K & W Farms, Inc.](#)
- [NutraFig](#)
- [Organic figs](#)
- [Passion Fruit Farms](#)
- [The Calimyrna Fig and Its Pollinator Wasp](#)
- [Valley Fig Growers](#)

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