

Figs

The fig might have been the true "forbidden fruit" in the Garden of Eden, but it remains undisputed that the first article of clothing worn by mankind was made of fig leaves. In fact, the fabulous fig has existed since almost the beginning of time. From Attica to Assyria and from Babylonia to Sumer, the fig has survived the fall of some of the greatest empires of the world.

Because of its noted quality as an energy food, the fig "figured" prominently in the diet of the first Greek Olympians. Likewise, the gluttonous Epicureans of the Roman Empire feasted on figs. Shakespeare made numerous references to figs in his works as well. In his play Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra is delivered a basket of figs containing an asp, the venomous snake that ultimately causes her death.

Figs are available in many varieties, both fresh and dried. Fresh figs are soft, sweet and a true treat. They can be eaten as is, baked, stewed, poached and even grilled. For a memorable treat, serve with prosciutto ham and fresh sliced melon.

CULTIVARS

Adriatic (Fragola, Strawberry Fig, Verdone, White Adriatic) Origin central Italy, Small to medium, skin greenish, flesh strawberry colored. Good, all-purpose fig. Light breba crop. Large vigorous tree leafs out early; subject to frost damage. Prune to force new growth.

Black Mission (Beers Black, Franciscan, Mission) Origin Balearic Islands. Fruits all-over black purple, elongated, Flesh watermelon to pink, fairly good taste. Easily dried at home. Single best all-round variety for south, north, coast, interior. Brebas prolific, fairly rich. Tree very large, plant at maximum spacing. Do not prune after tree reaches maturity. Commences growth midseason.

Blanche (Italian Honey fig, Lattarula, Lemon, White Marseille) Medium to large, skin yellowish green, flesh white to amber, very sweet, lemon flavor. Light breba crop. Valuable in short-season, cool-summer areas. Slow growing, dense, hardy tree.

Brown Turkey (Aubique Noire, Negro Largo, San Piero Origin Provence. Medium, skin is purplish brown, flesh pinkish amber. Good flavor. Best when fresh. Light breba crop. Small, hardy, vigorous tree. Prune severely for heaviest main crop. Does best in southern California.

Celeste (Blue Celeste, Honey Fig, Malta, Sugar, Violette) Small to medium, skin is light violet to violet-brown, flesh reddish amber. Very sweet, usually dried. Light breba crop. Tightly closed eye, good for Southeast. Small, productive, hardy.

Conadria Origin Ira Condit, Riverside 1956. First artificial hybrid fig. Fruit pale green, medium, flesh strawberry red. Mildly sweet. Good fresh, excellent dried. More productive than Adriatic but of lesser quality. Light breba crop. Tree vigorous, tends to excessive growth under irrigation, best in hot climates.

Croisic (Cordelia, Gillette, St. John) Only edible caprifig. Fruits very early, only brebas are useful. Fruits pale yellow, small, pulp nearly white, without a lot of character. Tree low, dense, spreading. . For north coast and Pacific Northwest.

Desert King (Charlie, King) Origin Madera, Calif. 1920. San Pedro type. Large, skin is deep green, minutely spotted white, pulp strawberry red. Sweet, delicious fresh or dried. Commonly matures good fruit without caprification near the coast. Tree highly vigorous. Hardy, best adapted to cool areas such as the Pacific Northwest.

Excel Origin W.B. Storey, Riverside, 1975. Large, skin is yellow, flesh light amber. Fruits practically neckless, blocky. Very sweet. Excellent, all-purpose fig. Light breba crop. Similar to Kadota but more productive. Tree vigorous, even rank. Does well in most parts of California.

Flanders Origin I.J. Condit, Riverside, 1965. Seedling of White Adriatic. Medium, long neck, skin is brownish yellow with violet stripes, flesh amber. Strong, fine flavor. Excellent all-purpose fruit. Good breba crop. Ripens late. Tree vigorous but requires no great pruning. For south coastal California, San Joaquin Valley.

Judy Origin Leonard Jessen, Pasadena, 1986. Probable seedling of California Brown Turkey. Large and broad, fruit is brown to black, pulp pink.

Kadota (Dottato, Florentine, White Kadota) Medium, skin is yellowish green, flesh amber, tinged pink at center. Flavor rich. Resists souring. Little or no breba crop. Tree upright, requires annual pruning to slow growth. Requires hot, dry climate for best quality.

Len Origin Leonard Jessen, Pasadena, 1984. Seedling of Black Mission. Fruit smaller than Mission, black, pulp pink, quite sweet.

Osborn's Prolific (Arachipel, Neveralla) Medium to large, skin is dark reddish brown, flesh amber, often tinged pink. Very sweet, best fresh. Light breba crop. Tree upright, bare, will grow in shade. Ripens late. Only for north coast, Pacific Northwest. Poor in warm climates.

Panachee (Striped Tiger, Tiger) Small to medium, skin is greenish yellow with dark green strips, flesh strawberry, dry but sweet. Best fresh. No breba crop. Requires long, warm growing season. Ripens late.

Tena Origin W.B. Storey, Riverside, 1975. Small, skin is light green, flesh amber. Fine flavor.

Good fresh or dried. Good breba crop. Bears heavily. Tree strong, dense. For coastal California and interior south.

Genoa (White Genoa) Medium, skin is greenish yellow to white, flesh yellow-amber. Sweet, good fresh or dried. Light breba and main crops. Tree upright, requires constant annual pruning. Best adapted to cooler regions of the West. Very late in northern California, continuing to ripen even after first frosts.

Ventura Large, skin is green, flesh deep red, long neck. Excellent flavor. Good fresh or dried. Good breba crop. Ripens late but matures well in cool areas. Compact tree.

Verte (Green Ischia) Small, skin is greenish yellow, flesh strawberry. Excellent fresh or dried. Good breba crop. Small tree. Recommended for short-summer climates.