

FIG

Fig, name for members of the genus *Ficus* of the family Moraceae [mulberry family]. This large genus contains some 800 species of widely varied tropical vines [some of which are epiphytic]; shrubs; and trees, including the banyan, the peepul, or bo tree, and the India-rubber tree. It differs from other genera of the family in that the hundreds of tiny female flowers are borne on the inside of a syconium, a fleshy fruitlike receptacle with a small opening at the apex. The common fig

[*F. carica*], a native of the Mediterranean area, has been bred and cultivated from early times for its commercially valuable fruit and has been naturalized in other parts of the world that have a mild, semiarid climate;

in the United States, figs are grown in California, Texas, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. Some edible varieties [e.g., the Smyrna, among the best] can be pollinated only by the fig wasp [*Blastophaga*], which passes its larval stage inside the inedible fruit of a wild variety called the caprifig. In order to produce mature fruit, the cultivated variety is subjected to a process called caprification; flowering branches of caprifig are hung in the tree so that the emerging wasps will transfer caprifig pollen to the edible fig. After entering the receptacle and laying its eggs, the wasp dies and its body and eggs are absorbed by the developing fruit; only the eggs laid inside the caprifig fruit survive. Other edible varieties [e.g., the Adriatic or mission fig] bear larger fruits when caprified. The ripe fruit [called a synconium] contains masses of tiny seeds and is soft and pear-shaped; it may be greenish, yellow to orange, or purple in color. The name fig is also applied to various unrelated plants that either resemble the fig tree or bear figlike fruits. Figs are classified in the division Magnoliophyta, class Magnoliopsida, order Urticales, family Moraceae.

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