

# Ray's Figs Ray's Figs

## Ethnic Figs in America

The great bulk of fig varieties in the trade consist of varieties imported from Europe and the Middle East and of saved seedlings. Only a few varieties were brought into the U.S. until the annexation of California in 1848-49. Individual settlers there began importing varieties in the early 1850s, but the great expansion of imports began in 1880, first with the efforts of the *San Francisco Examiner* to import the best Turkish varieties and, second with the establishment of an importation program in the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Their most noteworthy importation was the nearly 100 varieties in the Chiswick Collection from Great Britain. Many of our best figs derive from it. Details are given in Gustav Eisen's *The Fig: Its History, Culture and Curing*.

The USDA imports tapered off after this, but a few varieties continue to dribble in. Recent imports include **Zidi** from Tunisia in the 1950s and **Nazari** from Israel in 1997. There are also rumors about figs smuggled in without phytosanitary certificates and USDA import permits. I do not condone such activities. Many of those smuggled into the U.S., however, were smuggled in by immigrants decades ago and the offense is no longer punishable under the Statute of Limitations. Some that probably fall in this category are **Chicago Hardy** and **Sal's Fig**.

Sal's Fig was introduced into the trade by the DiPaola family who own the Belleclare Nursery, 671 Old Country Road, Plainview, N.Y. 11803 (516) 681-4777 (no mail orders unfortunately). Here is a recent sales list with comments on origin/ethnicity and descriptions provided by the DiPaolas. If you are interested in purchasing from them, I suggest you contact them for a current varieties and price list.

- Aboukounis Black (Greek)--Large, purple-black with dark red pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Chios C
- Barese White (Italian)--Large white with strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Columbro
- Chios Red (Greek)--Medium, reddish-brown with dark red pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Chios White (Greek)--Large, white, pear-shaped. Strawberry pulp. Two crops
- Corfu (Greek)--Large, white, pear-shaped with dark strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Speros
- Crete (Greek)--Large, white, light strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Kronos
- Fico Bianco (Calabria, Italy)--Large, round with red pulp. Two crops
- Fico Bianco (Columbro, Italy)--Large, white with amber pulp. Breba crop only. (San Pedro type)
- Fico Nera (Abruzzi, Italy)--Medium black fig with dark-red pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Corragio
- Fico Nera Duemane (San Angelo DiLombardi, Italy)--Medium, purple-black with dark-red pulp. Sweet. Synonym: Mountain Fig
- Fico Rosso (Taranto, Sicily)--Large, red fig with dark-red pulp. Breba crop only. (San Pedro type)
- Italian Everbearing--Large purple-brown with dark-red pulp. Two crops
- Italian Purple Beefera--Large, round, purple with strawberry pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Italian Purple Red--Medium, round with dark-red pulp. Two crops
- Kalamata Black (Greek)--Medium, black with dark-red pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Kalamata White (Greek)--Large, round, with dark-pink pulp. Main crop only.
- Large Greek White (Cypriot)--Large, pear-shaped with dark-red pulp. Two crops
- Malta Black--Medium, black dark-red pulp. Sweet. Two crops. DiPaola says it is a grandparent of Celeste.
- Montellone (Genoa, Italy)--Large, round, white with pale-amber pulp. Two crops
- Mykonos Black (Greek)--Large, pear-shaped, reddish to purple-black with strawberry pulp. Brebas only (San



Pedro type). Synonym: Perkounis

- Mykonos White (Greek)--Large with strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Thina
- Pasquale Bianco (Italian)--Medium white with dark-strawberry pulp. Main crops only
- Pasquale Vernino (Italian)--Medium black with dark-red pulp. Main crop only
- Sicilian Black--Medium-large, dark-black with red pulp. Very juicy and sweet. Two crops. Synonyms: Fico Nera, Sal's Fig
- Sicilian Black--Medium to large with dark-red pulp. Two crops. Synonyms: Sal's, Corleone, Fico di Capo, Fico-Nera
- Sicilian Black--Medium, black with dark-red pulp. Synonyms: Verna Grosso, Agrigenta
- Sicilian Red--Medium, reddish-brown with dark-red pulp. Two crops

It is possible, even probable, that many of these varieties are simply synonyms for known varieties. The DePaolas report that some 85% or more of the figs grown in the Brooklyn-Queens, New York City are: Italian Everbearing, Brown Turkey, Mission and Kadota. These figs work for northern growers because they produce figs in moderately hot summers and bumper crops in the occasional long, hot summers in the Northeastern U. S. Northerners should try these four varieties and not rely on exotic varieties from far-away, mailorder nurseries before they gain some experience.

I am very interested in acquiring some of the DiPaola varieties, but until I have the time to travel to New York it will just have to wait--unless some kind yankee reader can help. Please e-mail me at [thegivans@planters.net](mailto:thegivans@planters.net) if you're a yankee from New York City or Long Island and are willing to help a poor old rebel acquire a few more figs for my little old collection. (I'll swap with yankees. When it comes to acquiring new fig varieties I'll overlook the recent War of Northern Aggression against Southern Independence.)

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