

# Ray's Figs

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## Identifying Fig Varieties

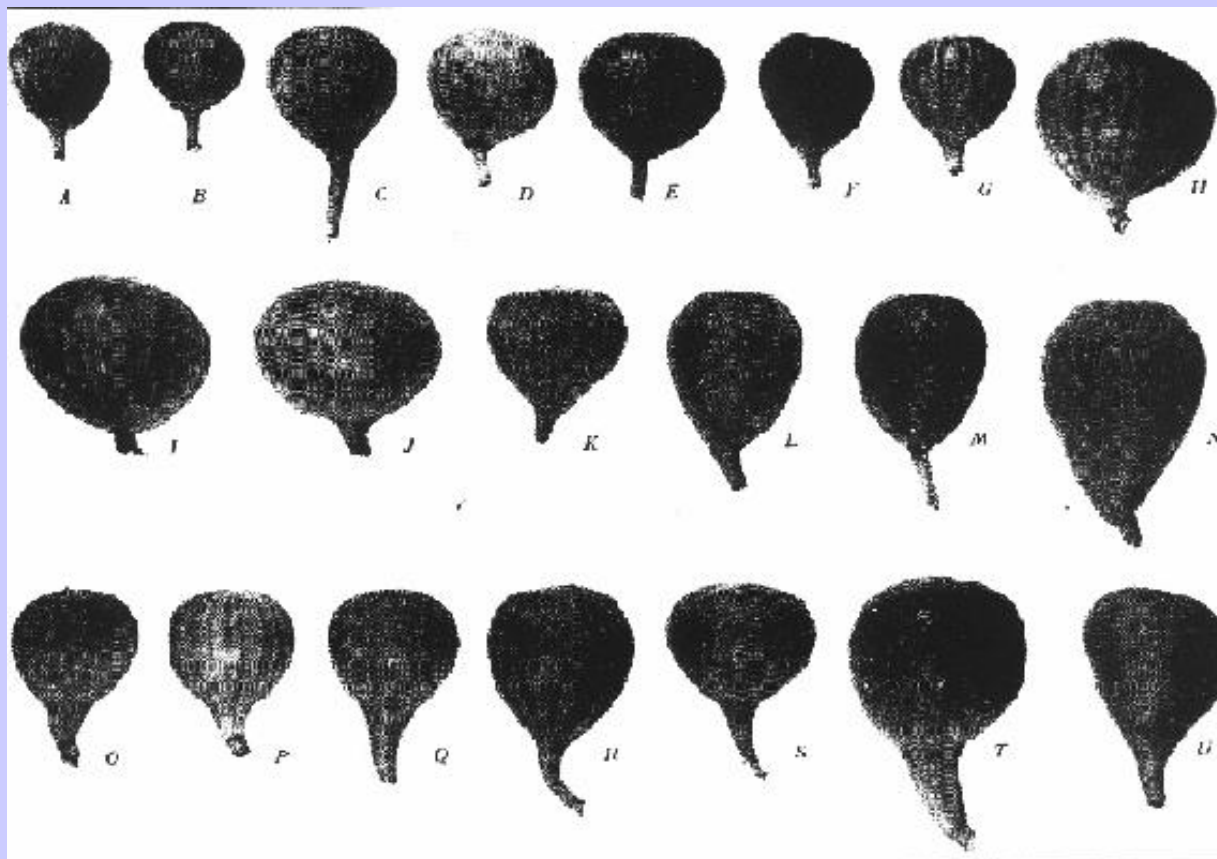
This listing of 50+ varieties includes most of the figs available in the trade. I list them as green and yellow figs and dark figs, using bold type for the correct name, the one found in the scientific literature. (If there is no name in bold type, the variety is not covered by Condit or later authors.) I use Condit's names with three exceptions: **Blanche**, **Bordeaux** and **Cuore**. These names follow from the naming rules of botany which recognize the first name given to a variety as the correct name. It seems to me that no one has established naming rules for horticulture and that applying the rules of botany is not necessarily a good thing in horticulture. Botanists give names to previously unknown, new species they have discovered and no one can, I think, rationally object to this. But where varieties are in cultivation, they are already known at least to their cultivators and there I think it inappropriate to willy-nilly re-name them to fit the fancy of the "describer." Horticultural taxonomy ought to insist on using the name their cultivators have given them. The most commonly used name and the Rule of First Publication should naturally determine the "proper" name when a cultivar has more than one name.

These three varieties (**Blanche**, **Bordeaux** and **Verdal**) all have different names in the areas where they are grown and/or marketed. *Blanche* is particularly unfortunate because it is just the French word for *white* and this could apply to many different fig varieties. In France this variety is commonly called **Marseilles**, again probably after its place of origin or, possibly, the original center of trade in the variety.

**Bordeaux** is a French region which grows many varieties of figs. Condit's *Bordeaux* is usually and appropriately called **Negronne** in Bordeaux (after the town of Negronne which is apparently its place of origin). Giorgio Gallesio coined the **Cuore**, which means "heart-shaped," in 1817 for the fig already known as **Rubado** in Liguria.

My short descriptions will not enable you to identify all of the gift and heirloom figs that you acquire or find. But, if I have done the job right, they should help you eliminate some impossible identities and identify at least some of the duplicate, i.e. synonym varieties in your collection. *The Fig Booklet* which I co-wrote with Fred Born contains many more descriptions. For information on buying it, see [Ray's Price List](#).

The key to identifying fig varieties correctly is using Condit's system of leaf and fruit classifications. Condit lists many characteristics in his own identifications, but I have room for only the major features of the fruit and leaves. Fig fruit has many different possible shapes as shown in this chart from Condit's 1941 article:



Forms of fig fruits: A-E, spherical w/o neck; F-K, spherical with neck; I, oblate without neck; J, oblate with neck; K-M, turbinate; N, pyriform with neck undifferentiated from body; O-T, pyriform; U, oblique- pyriform. A, Précoce de Barcelone; B, Ischia; C, Pastilière; D, Madeleine; E, Marseilles; F, Toulousienne; G, Martinique; H, Dauphine; I, San Pedro; J, Calimyrna; K, Bourjassotte Grisé L, Brunswick; M, Gouraud Rouge; N, San Pietro; O, Fraga; P, Panachée; Q, Gota de Mel; R, Pied de Boeuf; S, Ficus palmata; T, Marabout; U, Datte.

Fig leaves also vary tremendously. There are two systems used to describe them. The first one was devised by Hugh N. Starnes around 1903. It divides fig leaves into five types: **Okra leaf**, **Grape leaf**, **Maple leaf**, **Spoon-bill**, and **Oak leaf**. Not a bad system, but you have to know the leaf shapes that Starnes had in mind to use it effectively. Oak leaves, for example, vary from species to species. The most common oaks in the Southeast have leaves with smooth margins and don't resemble Starnes' **oak leaf** at all. Starnes was not happy with his own system and invented another, better system which he and Monroe published in 1907. This is the system adopted by Condit and the one I use. Once you understand the technical terms it is easy to apply. The following figure and legend is from Condit's 1941 article in *Hilgardia* "Fig Characteristics Useful in the Identification of Varieties":

Leaf entire

base truncate--Hamma (A)

Leaf palmately lobed:

Base decurrent--Ischia (B)

Base truncate--Alma or Stanford caprifig (C)

Base cordate:

3-lobed--Constantine (D)

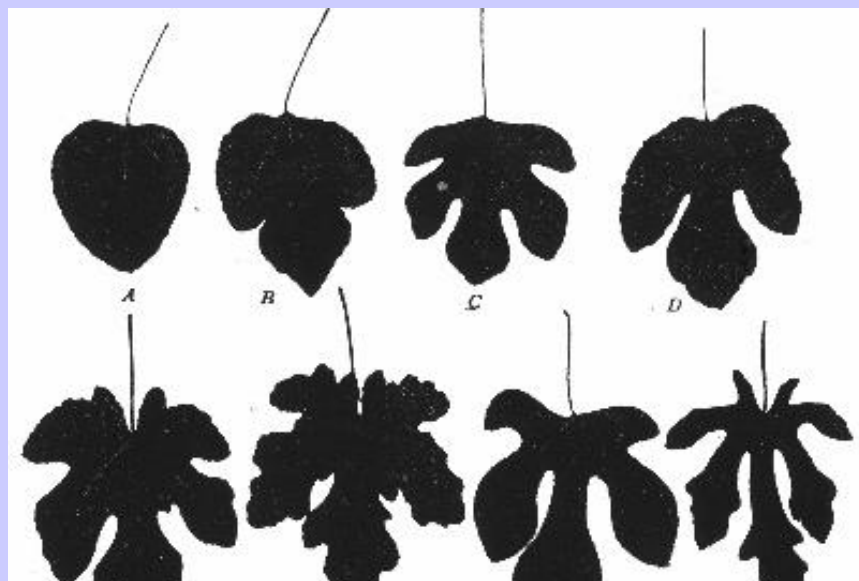
5-lobed, lobes spatulate--Calimyrna (G)

Base calcarate:

Lobes latate--Mission (E)

Lobes lyrate--San Piero (F)

Lobes lineate--Brunswick (H)



"Decurrent" - base runs down stem.

"Truncate" - base/stem form right angle.

"Cordate" -shaped like valentine heart.

"Calcarate - base forms an acute angle with stem.



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