

# Figs



Figs are a great fruit for our area, since they are among the most problem-free fruit trees for areas with relatively mild winters. (Technically, figs are not a fruit, but an enlarged, fleshy stem with tiny flowers on the stem's inner wall.) Fresh figs are a great treat. They also make tasty preserves. Fresh figs are not generally available in stores, since they do not handle shipping well.

Young figs especially should be protected from cold their first winter if planted in the fall - use some frost cover or plant the tree in a place out of the cold north wind. Do not fertilize figs at planting; fertilize carefully thereafter to minimize the fruit splitting or becoming watery tasting, to avoid winter damage. Never fertilize your figs in the fall. If they make new growth, it will likely have winter damage so don't encourage growth late in the year. Figs can freeze to the ground in the winter but they can recover from their roots. We recommend that you prune all your figs to a bush, allowing multiple trunks so that they are lower to the ground to make harvesting easier and to protect them from winter damage.

Varieties can be closed eye or open eye, or partially open eye; the closed eye varieties are less susceptible to bugs and water damage entering the bottom of the fruit. Most figs give two crops—one in the spring and one in the fall. Some only give one in the late spring to early summer.

Figs tend to be water hungry and their roots will travel long distances to get to water sources. They will crowd out other plants with weaker root systems and climb into the bottom of pots left on the ground-- so give them plenty of room and water readily. Figs do best in full sun, and especially the morning sun (so that rain water and dew have a chance to evaporate and prevent fig rust). We recommend three varieties for the Gonzales area.

**Brown Turkey.** Brown Turkey is a largish, brown skinned fig and an old favorite. It has reddish amber pulp and an excellent flavor. It is often grown to make preserves but it is an excellent table fig. It bears two crops a year— May-June and late September. It is a broad, spreading tree that wants good sun. It has five lobed leaves. We consider Brown Turkey a real workhorse fig.

**Texas Everbearing.** Texas Everbearing is a lovely medium to large, reddish brown skinned fig with a reddish pink pulp. It has excellent flavor and is a well-adapted and hardy fig for this area but may crack or sour in very wet years. It will fruit between June and August depending upon the circumstances of its immediate planting area. It has excellent flavor. It will give two crops a year. This fig is often mistaken for Brown Turkey since they are very similar, but the fruit is a little smaller and the leaves are three lobed rather than five. But they are pretty much interchangeable.

**Celeste.** Celeste is a lovely light brown skinned fig with light pink pulp. It's a little smaller than Texas Everbearing and Brown Turkey. It is more cold-hardy than other figs but it gives one main crop that starts to ripen in late July. It needs to be well watered in the heat.

**Alma.** This is a lovely little fig developed by Texas AgriLife Extension in 1975. It is a medium to small fruit with a golden-brown skin and amber pulp. It is very rich and sweet. It is very vigorous and productive but it is a little less cold hardy than others. It will give two crops per year.

Diseases. Like all plants, figs can have a few problems. They are susceptible to rust, both fig rust and fig mosaic rust so try to keep them where they will get good morning sun to dry their leaves early in the day. They can also be susceptible to root knot nematodes and cotton root rot which is a fungus. Figs are also susceptible to fig rust on the leaves, fig mosaic rust, and root knot nematodes. Cotton root rot (a fungus) is the number one killer of Texas' figs; unfortunately, once it is in the soil, almost nothing can be done to eliminate this fungus. In general, however, figs are highly successful in this area and should give you great fruit for years.

If you are a fig fan, plant Celeste and one of the other fig varieties and have figs all summer long!