



Urban Harvest  
Gardening for good.

## Figs

Category:	Temperate; deciduous
Hardiness:	Withstands average winter temperatures
Fruit Family:	Figs are a “multiple” fruit related to the mulberry
Light:	Full sun
Size:	10'H & W; may be pruned to desired height & width
Soil:	Well-drained soil required
Planting:	Plant during dormancy in Jan - Feb

Figs are easy to grow, and one tree can usually produce enough for an entire family with enough to share and to preserve. Most fig varieties yield two distinct crops of fruit each year. The first crop is produced on the previous year's shoot growth, while the second crop is borne on the leaf axils of the current season's growth. The sculptured trunks and limbs of fig trees provide winter interest for the garden.



### Care of Fig Trees

**Planting:** Select a planting area that is well-drained or create a raised planting bed. Remove all vegetation within a minimum three-foot diameter circle.

Trim any roots that appear to be circling the root ball and any broken or clearly dead roots. Dig a hole that is wide and deep enough to easily accommodate the root ball. The sides of the hole should be tapered outward, not straight down (visualize a wok, not a stock pot) with the widest point at the top of the hole. The

deepest point of the hole should be 2"-4" deeper than your measurement of the root ball; fig trees survive better if they are planted slightly deeper than they were in the nursery container.

Place the root ball in the prepared hole. Check for straightness. Backfill ½ of the depth with existing soil – no amendments should be added during planting. Water well and allow it to drain. Fill the remaining ½ of the depth. Tamp the soil, but do not pack hard. Water in well and water every day for a few days unless it rains. A mulch of rotted leaves is highly recommended. The mulch ring should extend to the drip line; figs do not compete well with turf grass.

**Pruning:** Fig trees may be trained to a single trunk and an open vase shape, but are more commonly grown as multi-trunked trees with up to four trunks. Pruning is not required for production, but some pruning is desirable for shaping and canopy management. Most figs produce new stems from the roots. You will quickly have a thicket on your hands unless you prune off root suckers. Thin mature

figs occasionally to stimulate new growth. Thin taller main branches to a side shoot, and then thin all nearby branches back below the main branches to keep the fruiting canopy within reach for harvesting. Pruning branch tips for height control should be done soon after harvesting to allow the tree to set buds for the following year. Root suckers and thinning of major branches is most easily accomplished during the dormant season.

**Production:** Figs will begin to set fruit in year 3 – 6 depending on variety. LSU Purple is cited as being precocious; producing a small crop in its second or third year.

**Watering:** Fig trees have large, shallow root systems. They are drought tolerant once they are established, but should not be allowed to become drought stressed while they are carrying a load of fruit as this may cause premature fruit drop. Slight leaf wilting in the afternoon is a sign that they are approaching drought stress. Soak the root area slowly and deeply occasionally during late spring, summer, and fall if rainfall is not adequate. Irrigation is seldom required in winter and early spring. Do not overwater fig trees, especially in heavy clay soils.

**Fertilizing:** Figs do not require heavy fertilization. Do not apply fertilizer at planting. Apply one of the following in late February or March each year, beginning the following spring after planting. Broadcast under the entire canopy space.

Slow release organic fertilizer: 1<sup>st</sup> year – ½ cup; 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> years – 3 pounds; subsequent years - 20 to 40 pounds per 1000 square feet.

Cottonseed meal: 1<sup>st</sup> year – 1.5 cups; 2<sup>nd</sup> year – 3 cups; 3<sup>rd</sup> year – 6 cups; mature trees – 3 to 6 quarts per inch of trunk measured at the base.

Figs will benefit from an annual application of compost and a constant mulch of rotting tree leaves as part of their nutrition program.

**Harvesting:** Figs will begin to droop downward as they ripen. As figs grow in size on the tree, look for signs of color change. Start tasting to judge sweetness. Once you have determined your preferred ripeness, harvest all figs at this same stage. The time from color change to ripeness is very quick. Harvest figs daily, early in the morning before the birds get to the fruit.

**Pests:** Birds are the main pest of figs. The most efficient way to deter them is to erect a framework of PVC and suspend bird netting over the tree.

**Winter protection:** Figs are hardy to the low teens. Protection is generally not required for mature, established trees. Cover young trees with burlap or frost cloth and bank leaves against the lower trunk if temperatures below 25° F are predicted.

### **Varieties of Figs for the 2018 Sale:**

***Celeste, Japanese Green (Ischia), Little Ruby, LSU Gold, LSU Purple, Olympian, Texas Ever-bearing, White Marseilles***

## Varieties of Figs for Southeast Texas

**Celeste:** The best for our area. This is the “sugar fig” of heirloom gardens. ‘Celeste’ has a purple-brown skin and a pale strawberry-pink flesh. The medium sized fruit has excellent flavor. Good for fresh eating, and excellent for processing. Ripens June-July. Closed eye. Very cold hardy.

**Italian Black:** Heirloom fig grown in Belle Chase, Louisiana for over 100 years. It was found near New Orleans and is thought to have been introduced to the area by Italian settlers. Nearly jet black fruit with a deep red pulp. Produces an early crop on old wood, and a summer crop on new wood. Ripens in July. Closed eye.

**Japanese Green (aka ‘Verte’ or ‘Green Ischia’):** Medium sized, thin-skinned fig with strawberry red flesh. The skin is green when ripe which partially camouflages the fruits from the birds. Stocky, rounded fruit with a short neck. Excellent flavor fresh or dried. Small tree even when mature making it a good choice for containers and smaller yards. Mid- to late-season, long harvest. Small, closed eye.

**Little Ruby:** This fig has a natural dwarf habit making it suitable for containers and patio gardens. The ruby-red fruits are bite-sized and sweet. Produces a strong breba crop on the previous season’s shoots. Mature height is approx. 4-feet.

**LSU Gold:** This is one of the very best, hybrid figs from LSU. It is a huge, flattened, bright golden fig up to 1¾ inches in diameter having a drop of "honey" at the small eye. The amber flesh is tender and exceptionally sweet. It is a vigorous grower and makes a fig at every leaf axil. It has a small, slightly open eye but resists splitting and souring.

**LSU Purple:** Glossy reddish to dark purple skin. White flesh with light strawberry pulp. Medium size, closed eye, very cold hardy. Nematode resistant. Released by Louisiana State University in 1991.

**Olympian:** This variety was introduced in 2014, but is actually an heirloom that was growing in a protected spot in Olympia, WA for over 100 years. It is adapted to both cool & warm climates. Olympian produces a huge fig - as large as a tangerine. It has purple skin and a red to purple flesh that is very sweet. Breba crop can ripen as early as May. Olympian is hardy into the teens. The plant is root hardy to 0°F once established and may freeze to the ground at this temperature, but will return in spring and produce a crop the following summer.

**O’Rourke (Improved Celeste):** Medium sized, light brown figs with amber pulp and a red center. These figs have long necks and partially closed eyes. The tree is a vigorous, upright grower.

**Texas Blue Giant:** Extra large fruit with purple skin and amber flesh. Very sweet, melt-in-your-mouth texture. Fruit is good fresh or dried. Everbearing habit. Developed in Texas and well-suited for hot climates. Moderately closed eye. **100 chill hours**

**Texas Ever-bearing:** Medium to large, plump fruits with reddish-brown skin and reddish-pink flesh. More upright habit than many varieties. Will bear two crops per year in good growing conditions; late

May to June, and late September to early November. Moderately closed eye. Sometimes confused as 'Brown Turkey', but growers note differences in leaf shape, pulp, and growth habit.

**White Marseilles:** Large, lemon-colored, thin-skinned fig with tender, white to light amber flesh. They are very sweet and have high sugar content. An old, reliable variety that was introduced to America from France by Thomas Jefferson. Produces a small breba crop. The eye is open, but very small. Do not over-water while fruit is ripening. (Aka Lattarula Fig, Blanche Fig, Lemon Fig)