

# GROWING EDIBLE FIGS

Edible figs can be grown in the Susquehanna Valley with some tips and extra winter protection. Location is key to growing figs outside year-round. The south side of the house benefits the plant in two ways: by providing maximum sunlight all year and protecting the fig from harsh winter winds. Dig a deep hole, amend the soil with plenty of dehydrated manure. Make sure the hole is wide enough to accommodate the roots which you will spread out like octopus tentacles in the hole. Cover the roots with good soil and tamp, then water, water, water. Figs in Italy grow best at the base of volcanoes. They love lime. Spread a 1 to 2-inch thick layer of pulverized lime around the base of the fig tree.

To keep the trees alive during the winter, bundle them with hay, burlap, and tar paper in that order after the first frost has blackened and knocked off the leaves.

In the spring, prune back any dead stems or branches. To stimulate growth, add a fresh 1-2 inch layer of pulverized lime around the base. Every two weeks fertilize with Miracle-Gro. Once a month fertilize with a slower release fertilizer like 5-10-5. Keep well watered in summertime drought.

Birds love to eat fresh figs as much as we do. Bird netting is a must as the figs develop and begin to ripen.

## Growing Dwarf Figs in Containers

If you don't want to bother with winterizing figs outdoors, you can grow dwarf varieties like Brown Turkey and Celeste in containers to bring indoors before frost. Containers will need to be at least 24 inches in diameter and 15 inches deep. Make sure there are plenty of drainage holes in your container. Plastic pots work best; they are lighter to move indoors. Layer the bottom of the tub with 2 inches of bark chips to promote drainage, add good soil. Spreading the roots set the fig tree plant about 6 inches from the bottom of the tub. Add soil. Tamp. Water. At the top, add a 2-inch layer of lime. Set the tubs with the dwarf black figs on a sheet of black plastic, which absorbs sunlight and hastens growth. Place tubs in an area that obtains maximum sunlight during the day. You will have ripe figs around the middle of September.

Later in the fall, frost will knock the leaves off the dwarf fig trees. When this happens, cut the top growth back 6 feet or so. Move inside to a warm section of the basement or garage. Water the trees once a month.

By March, the dwarf fig trees will start budding. Wait until threat of frost has passed and place outside.

## Fig Varieties

Black Turkey

Celeste

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Cont.

## FRESH FIGS AND PROSCIUTTO

8 ripe figs  
8 thin slices of prosciutto

Balsamic Vinaigrette:

½ c. balsamic vinegar  
½ c. olive oil  
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
2 leaves fresh basil  
2 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves only  
2 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves only  
2 or 3 cloves garlic

Use any kind of fresh figs, as long as they are at the peak of ripeness. Slice the figs in halves or quarters, as desired. Wrap them in slices of prosciutto, or shingle the figs and prosciutto on a serving platter.

For the vinaigrette, combine all ingredients in the basin of a food processor or blender and process until smooth, about 30 seconds. Drizzle the vinaigrette on the fresh figs and prosciutto.

## FIG PRESERVES

6 c. barely ripe figs  
3 c. sugar  
2 fresh lemon slices, without seeds  
Pint-sized canning jars and lids

Trim the stems from the figs and wash the fruit. Place the figs in a large bowl and cover them with the sugar. Cover the bowl, and let the figs set in the sugar overnight.

Place the figs, sugar, and lemon slices in a large saucepan and bring the mixture a boil, stirring frequently. Reduce the heat and let the mixture simmer over low heat, stirring frequently, until thick syrup has formed and the figs have softened, about an hour. Take care that the syrup does not burn.

Meanwhile, prepare the jars and lids according to the manufacturer's directions. After the jars have been sterilized, put the figs and syrup into the hot jars; cue a canning funnel. The figs should reach to within 1/4 inch of the top of the jars. Slide a wooden spoon down the inside of the jars with sterile lids and bands, then process in a hot water bath for 5 to 10 minutes.

Remove the jars from the hot water bath. The jars are sealed if the lid does not pop back when pressed with a finger or thumb (wait 12 to 24 hours before testing). Any jar of preserves that doesn't seal should be stored in the refrigerator. Sealed jars will keep indefinitely; once opened, however, they should be refrigerated.