



INFORMATION ON EDIBLE FIGS

BENEFITS: Figs are lusciously sweet with a texture that combines the chewiness of their flesh, the smoothness of their skin, and the crunchiness of their seeds. Figs are a good source of potassium, dietary fibre, vitamin B6 and are full of antioxidants.

DESCRIPTION: Figs grow on the Ficus tree (*Ficus carica*) which is part of the mulberry family. Figs range dramatically in color and subtly in texture depending upon the variety of which there are over 150 varieties. Since fresh figs are delicate and perishable, some of their mystique comes from their relative rarity. Because of this, the majority of figs are dried, either by exposure to sunlight or through an artificial process, creating a sweet and nutritious dried fruit that can be enjoyed throughout the year.

CARE: Fig trees like full sun and adequate room to grow. Growing figs requires well drained and fertile soils. Figs are naturally slow growing trees. A good amount of water is needed during fruit and foliage development, but when dormant or slow growing, overwatering is the most common cause for failure. You should fertilize your fig trees annually, however watch that you don't over fertilize with nitrogen as this can cause the plant to produce less fruit. Use a general all-purpose soluble fertilizer such as 10-10-10. Figs need to be protected in the winter time which in our climate requires them to be brought indoors. Most fig varieties are self-pollinating but an insect presence may be needed to help out. There are two crops per season, one formed on the previous year's growth, ripening in mid-summer, and one formed on the current season's growth, ripening in September and October.

OVERWINTERING: Bring your fig tree into the garage after a couple of light frosts, but before a first hard frost. The leaves will start to drop, indicating that the tree is going into dormancy. A garage is the perfect place for overwintering because it is fairly dark and cool, but above freezing. Pick off any fruit remaining after leaves drop in the fall. They will not ripen. Embryonic figs are formed in late summer and carried through winter on dormant branches as bumps. These swell in spring with warm temperatures. Be careful of frost, which can damage the little figs once they begin to grow. Trees defoliate and go dormant with the first frost. In that dormant state, they can also be stored in a cool, dark basement. The key is to provide that dormant period. They have to sleep otherwise they might not fruit. In partially heated area such as sunrooms, water only occasionally. Dormant figs don't require light. Most figs are hardy to -5° to -10° C or 14°-23°F.

PRUNING: The first time you should prune a fig tree is when it is first planted. Trim by about half and this will allow the tree to focus on developing its roots and becoming well established. In the next winter after transplanting, it is best to start pruning fig trees for "fruiting wood." This is wood that you will be pruning to help keep the fruit healthy and easy to reach. Select 4 to 6 branches to be your fruiting wood and prune away the rest. If grown in containers keep plant pruned for a manageable size.

HARVESTING: Harvesting your fruits can be done as soon as the fruit is softening. Figs are not tasty unless they are fully ripe, so you will have to leave them on the tree until they are ripe. Figs will stop ripening once they are removed from the tree. You can store them in the fridge up to a week before eating.