

Figs

One of the oldest fruit trees grown by humans is the fig. Fortunately for us in Central Texas, figs are easy to grow. They do not need very rich soil, but do need good drainage. ***The common fig, grown in CenTex, does not require pollination to bear fruit.*** They can *start* bearing in just 2 - 4 years. Choose a location that receives full sun at least 6 - 8 hours a day. Morning sun is especially important so that dew dries quickly from the leaves; otherwise they are prone to rust disease. Give each tree space that allows the tree to grow *at least* 12 - 20 feet wide. Since they can occasionally be injured by frost, a location on the south side of a building can provide extra warmth in winter. Prepare the soil with plenty of good quality compost before planting. If you're planting in clay soil, make a raised bed by also mixing in a prepared soil. Consult our handout *Planting & Maintenance Guide for Fruits, Nuts, & Berries* for more information.

Fig trees do not like heavy pruning. For example, mature Celeste trees will produce fewer fruits the spring after a winter pruning. Weak, diseased, or dead limbs should be pruned out in winter. Fig trees prefer regular composting instead of fertilizing. Apply a 2" to 3" layer of ***high quality compost*** in the spring and fall over the entire root zone, especially if your fig is a freeze-sensitive variety. The shallow rooted trees will also benefit from a layer of mulch during the hotter summer months to maintain even soil moisture. Fig fruits have "eyes" or ostioles that, when open, can be susceptible to souring and insects such as the dried fruit beetle. New cultivars with closed eyes have been introduced.¹

The fruit must ripen on the tree. Harvest figs when the fruit changes color and becomes soft. The stem should separate easily. Consider using **Holographic Scare Tape** to keep the birds from harvesting the fruit before you do, or try hanging old CDs to help scare them away. After harvest and heading into fall, reduce watering. This will encourage the tree to go dormant. After dormancy, water deeply every 3 - 4 weeks, and a few days in advance of a freeze for greater frost protection.

Certain varieties of fig may produce more than one crop per year. A breba (or more commonly breva in Spanish) is a common fig that develops in the spring on the previous year's shoot growth. In contrast, the main fig crop develops on the current year's shoot growth and ripens in late summer or fall

Fig Varieties for Central Texas

Alma – Medium-sized fruit ripening July to August. Though the skin is an "unattractive" green to brown color, the fruit is of *high quality with rich, sweet flesh* of a light tan color and few seeds, with a *moderately closed eye*. The Alma has an average growth rate with early, vigorous production. Fruit may be eaten fresh or processed. *Needs protection from hard freezes* or will suffer branch die back.

Black Mission - Large sized fruit that produces a heavy first crop (brebe) in early summer and an average main crop in late fall. *Fruit is sweet, with a light strawberry pulp and purple-black skin.* A vigorous growing tree though it is *not very cold hardy*. It is best suited for parts of the state with milder winters. The black mission has some problems with leaf mosaic, but it does not seem to affect the fruit. Large size of fruit and rich taste make it a premium fig, good fresh or dried. *Closed eye* variety.

Brown Turkey – Medium to large fruit ripening late June, continuing to ripen through August. *Good quality, nearly seedless, sweet, mild-flavored,* reddish-pink flesh with reddish-brown and purplish skin with a *moderately closed eye*. The brown turkey is a large and productive tree with vigorous growth and the longest ripening season of all recommended varieties. Good for making preserves. The tree can recover from freeze injury by producing a fair crop on vegetative growth the next season. Some consider this the same tree as Texas Everbearing. It can produce two crops per year.

¹ University of Florida IFAS Extension Publication HS27

Celeste – Small to medium sized fruit, ripening mid to late June. *Firm, juicy, rich, sweet white flesh, shading to rose in the center with purple-brown skin with a tightly closed eye.* Celeste will become a large tree with vigorous growth and heavy production of excellent fruit. Delicious for fresh-eating, drying or preserves. *It is the most cold-hardy of all Texas varieties.*

Haupt – Local central Texas heirloom fig from a German rancher near Kyle. Haupt produces a steady crop on a mid-sized bush from June through October. *Ripens to pale yellow with good sweetness and texture. Cold hardiness outside of the hill country unknown. Moderately closed eye, that opens with maturity.*

Italian Black – This is a hard-to-find heirloom variety from Louisiana with large fruit, ripening July to August. *Round, sweet with great-tasting, deep amber to red flesh and almost jet black skin, with a moderately open eye.* The tree has good cold hardiness.

LSU Purple – Medium to large fruit that, on a mature tree, may produce three crops in a single year. A light breba crop can appear in early spring, a heavy crop in summer, and a late crop sometimes lasting into December. *Light strawberry flesh with high sugar content and lacking a “figgy” taste.* Fruit has glossy, reddish to dark purple skin with a *moderately closed eye.* This is a vigorous, upright tree that is resistant to leaf diseases, but *needs protection from hard freezes.*

O’Rourke – Medium sized tan colored fruit with a golden reddish color inside. *Great flavor with medium sweetness and a mostly closed eye.* Also known as “Improved Celeste” as Celeste is one of the parents, ripening a good 1-2 weeks earlier.

Texas Blue Giant – Extra large sized fruit that ripens August to September. Fruit has a *closed eye, is mildly sweet taste, with amber to pink flesh and purple skin. Needs protection from hard freezes.*

Texas Everbearing – Medium to large fruit with a *moderately closed eye, ripening June through August.* The flesh is reddish-pink as is the skin, *nearly seedless and has a mild sweet flavor with a moderately closed eye.* This vigorous, large, productive tree produces the most common variety of fig in Central Texas. Some consider this the same variety as Brown Turkey.

Tiger or Panache – Small to Medium sized fruit with a *closed eye* that ripens August to September. *Fruit is sweet, with a flavor similar to strawberry or raspberry jam.* The flesh is crimson-colored, with a green-ribbed or “tiger striped” skin. Tree does not put on early spring “breba” crop. Fruit requires long warm growing season with temperatures regularly above 95° F in order to develop good flavor and sweetness. Mature trees are hardy to 15° F, while developing trees *need protection from hard freezes.*

Propagation - Figs are one of the easiest fruit crops to propagate. Hardwood cuttings taken when the plants are fully dormant readily root and are most commonly used for propagation of figs. Cuttings should be six to ten inches in length and approximately one-half to one inch in diameter. Place the cuttings in a warm, humid environment such as wrapping them in a moist paper towel and placed in a polyethylene bag for 10-14 days to encourage callus formation. Cuttings can then be planted in pots in a commercial potting media to encourage rooting and shoot formation. Softwood cuttings can also be used for propagation, but a mist system is usually needed for successful plant production.²

² Figs, Jim Kamas, Monte Nesbitt & Larry Stein Extension Fruit Specialists, Texas AgriLife Extension