

Since you are not likely to get more than the breba crop of any fig variety without resorting to pot culture or greenhouse growing, taking care of fig trees is easy. They should be managed as small trees or large bushes with many new branches to keep the figs within reach without having to use a ladder. Prune about 1/3 of the limbs out of the tree back to or near their source each Spring on a rotating basis. That leaves 2/3 of the limbs to set the breba crop. The new shoots forced to grow as a result of pruning will produce their breba crop the following year. Figs will finish ripening off the tree but taste best if picked when mushy-soft to the touch and drooping straight down.

Classified as a Subtropical plant, figs respond to as much heat as they can get in our climate. Winter die-out temperatures are around -12°C to -18°C or lower (10°F to 0°F), depending on variety. They do fine in most Northwest soil conditions preferring rich, well drained slightly acidic soil and ample Summer watering.

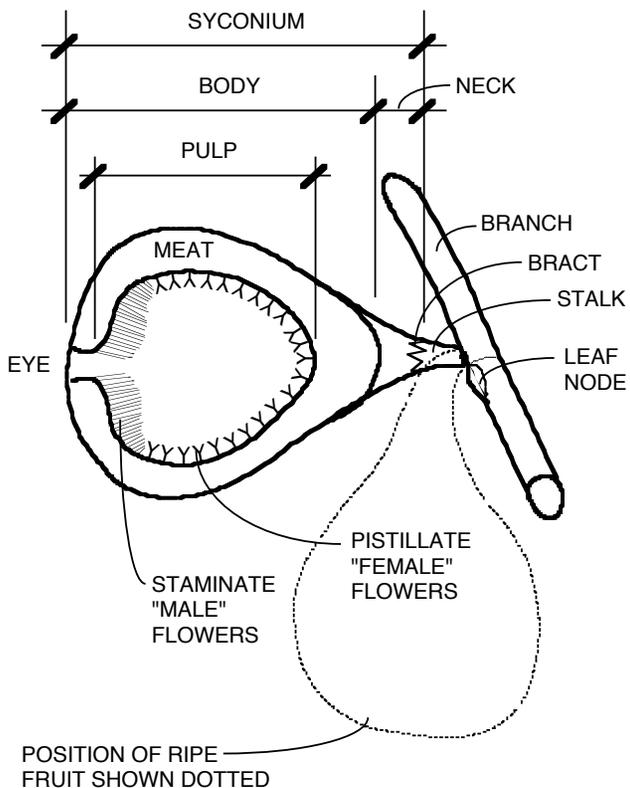
As previously stated, micro-climate is everything when growing figs in the Puget Sound Region. Equally important is how and where you plant the trees. Heat retained at the root system should be your goal. Plants sheltered from prevailing winds are preferable to those in an open field, planting in a raised bed is better than planting on the flat, planting close to a building to make use of its foundation as a "heat sink" helps and of course if you plant figs on the high side of a protected south facing retaining wall, you are doing as much as possible to give the fig optimum growing conditions.

Some critters including raccoons and certain birds will prey on the fruit if it is accessible. Netting over the tree may be the only protection against birds, but raccoons can be deterred by painting tanglefoot® on the trunk. Since they don't like sticky feet, they will leave the tree alone unless they can climb onto it via a nearby tree or structure. Thus far figs in our area don't seem to be prone to insect or disease problems.

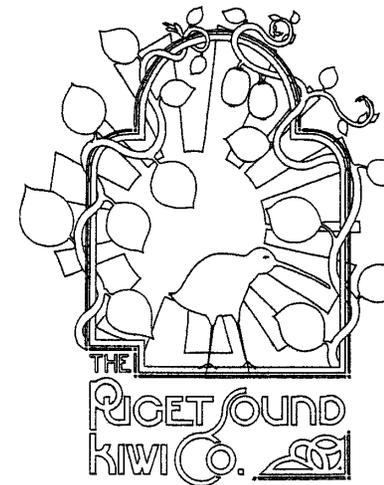
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 "Kiwi Bob" Glanzman, Proprietor
 1220 N.E. 90th ST. Rev. 4-00, 3-02,
 Seattle, WA 98115-3131 4-06, 9-09
 PHONE/FAX (206) 523-6403 kiwibob@scn.org
<http://sites.google.com/site/kiwifruitsalad2>

WCFS: Western Cascade Fruit Society, a non-profit membership organization with chapters throughout the Puget Sound Region. <http://www.wcfs.org>
 NAFEX: North American Fruit Explorers, also a non-profit membership organization: <http://www.nafex.org>



SECTION THROUGH A DEVELOPING CAPRIFIG
 NOTE THAT ALL FLOWERS IN SMYRNA, SAN PEDRO, AND COMMON TYPE FIGS ARE PISTILLATE "FEMALE" FLOWERS.

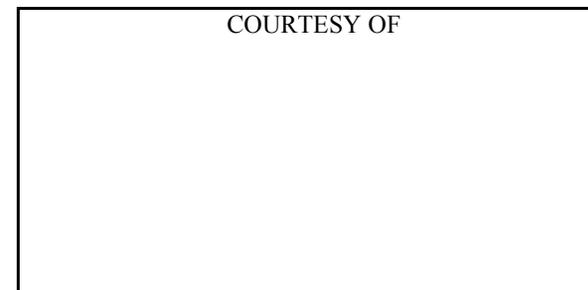


FIGS

For The Puget Sound Region

The Genus *Ficus* is a member of the Mulberry family, *Moraceae*. This family includes more than 60 genera and nearly 2,000 species of trees, shrubs, and vines, both evergreen and deciduous. *Moraceae* family members are native to temperate and tropical regions throughout the world. Some of the Fig's better known relatives are *Castilla elastica* (rubber trees), *Morus* (mulberries), *Artocarpus* (breadfruit), and *Maclura pomifera* (osage orange) native to Arkansas and Texas.

Edible figs (*Ficus carica*) are native to areas near the Mediterranean and eastward into parts of Asia. It may possibly be the first tree deliberately cultivated by man for its fruit. Rumors of using fig leaves as early clothing might be exaggerated but the plant and its relatives have uses other than edible fruit. One such use is for latex produced by rubber trees. The edible fig also contains a form of latex that is apparent when branches are cut in the Spring or when figs are picked prematurely. It is annoying to get the latex on your hands, so don't pick the figs until they are fully ripe!



Most of what we currently know about edible figs is based on growing them in California or at best in Oregon's Willamette Valley, and much of that knowledge can't be applied here. For the Puget Sound Area gardener it is necessary to realize the impact of micro-climate on your ability to grow figs. Simply stated, micro-climate is everything! It will dictate whether or not you can grow figs as well as the varieties that can be grown and those which cannot.

A bit of fig terminology is necessary to understand their growth habits and how to care for your fig trees. In warmer regions like the Mediterranean and California, figs can produce several crops or a "continuous" crop each year. The first crop is called "Breba" and occurs immediately above the leaf nodes of the previous year's growth. Second crop figs are called "Main crop" and they always develop above the leaf nodes of current season growth. The terms "profichi", "mammoni", and "mamme" each describe a crop of the Caprifig but lose relevance in our climate.

The edible fig is neither a fruit nor a flower. It is called a "Syconium" which is a hollow structure with flowers covering its inner surface. These flowers are either male (staminate) or female (pistillate). Female flowers occur in all Fig syconium, and both occur within Caprifig syconium. Some varieties require pollination to set and mature the syconium while others don't. There are four types of figs: 1-Caprifigs which describes all Figs with male flowers in their syconia, & may or may not set a first crop. 2-Smyrna type figs which contain only female flowers. This type rarely produces a Breba crop. It requires "caprification" (pollination) by a specialized wasp to set a Main crop of figs. 3-San Pedro type which generally set a good Breba crop and may or may not set a Main crop without caprification. 4-Common type figs which may set no Brebas, have a moderate, or a good Breba crop. Figs of the Breba crop mature & Main crop common figs mature without caprification. Since the *Blastophaga* wasp which "caprifigs" figs is not present in our region, you can forget growing the Smyrna type here. With few exceptions, figs grown outdoors in our area rarely if ever set and mature more than the Breba crop. Only in low-lying protected micro-climates like some areas of Vashon and Bainbridge Island is it possible to set a Main crop without extreme measures like potting the tree and moving it indoors for the winter or burying it in mulch.

Many fig varieties have more than one common name, and often by mistake, the same name has been tagged to different varieties. When modern fig pioneer Ira Condit published his "Fig Varieties: A Monograph" in 1955, he was able to identify 657 different cultivars or varieties after all common names had been accounted for.

Edible figs have been grown in the Pacific Northwest since the late 1800's and range as far north as the middle coastal regions of British Columbia. They grow quite well in many of our coastal cities including Seattle, Tacoma, and Vancouver B.C. In inland areas like Lynden, Monroe, Roy, and Chehalis, the micro-climate dictates that few if any varieties will produce on a regular basis if they can even survive. The Puget Sound Kiwi Company is currently conducting a "Puget Sound Regional Fig Test", with testers in Sequim, San Juan Island, Sedro Woolley, Sumner/Bonney Lake, and Shelton. Testers are needed in areas of Western Washington with more severe micro-climates. See my website! Following is a list of common varieties and how they are likely to perform in our area:

Type (1-4): "Variety Name"; aka "other names": Reliability in years/10: Flavor and Sugar content (mild, medium, good, excellent (author's opinion)): Size (length x diameter in mm x weight in grams): Description: Comments. (Note maturity dates vary by micro-climate).

1 "Gillette"; aka "Croisic", "Cordelia": 10/10: mild: 70x55mm x 60g: Yellowish-green skin, white flesh, white pulp with honey colored seeds: Clearly the most reliable fig for the Puget Sound region, it is least likely to have winter die-back, and should be the first fig to attempt in marginal micro-climates. Sets only one crop maturing mid August-September. A Caprifig.

3 "Desert King"; aka "King": 9/10: medium: 70x60mm x 90g: Light green skin, white flesh, strawberry colored pulp: Perhaps the second most reliable fig for the Puget Sound region. Prone to some winter die-back. Does well in the cities. Worth trying in marginal micro-climates. Sets most Breba figs of any variety, matures mid August-September. Attempts in vain to set a main crop which never matures.

4 "Brown Turkey"; aka "English or Eastern Brown Turkey", "La Perpetuelle", aka (17 other names): 5/10: medium: Mahogany-brown skin tinged with violet, white meat with violet lining, pulp is strawberry colored: Not recommended for growing outside of the most favorable micro-climates or coastal cities, this variety should be planted in a "heat sink" for best results. Often affected by winter die-back. Sets a small or no Breba crop, maturing in mid August-September.

4 "Vashon Violet"; aka "Brunswick": Reliability 9/10: very rich "figgy" flavor, good sugar content: 100x55mm x ±150g: Large leaves usually with 7 deeply lobed "fingers". Grown on Vashon Island for many years, it is the best fresh fig grown around Puget Sound this author has eaten, little is known about how it performs outside our most favorable micro-climates. Sets a few huge Brebas, matures late August-Sept. Attempts in vain to set a main crop which never matures.

4 "Brunswick"; aka "Magnolia", "Madonna": See "Vashon Violet": Dull reddish-brown skin with violet tint, amber pulp tinged with pink: Likely the same variety as a tree grown 80+ years in Walla Walla!

4 "Lattarula"; aka "Italian Honey Fig", "Blanche", "White Marseilles": 9+/10: medium: 80 w/10mm stalk x 55mm x ±65g: Light yellow-green skin, white meat, honey colored pulp: Favorite fig of certain WCFS members who grew it in a pot that was moved indoors in the Fall. There are so many figs called "Honey Fig" it is difficult to tell if this is one of two "Italian Honey Figs" grown on Vashon Island. Several home growers report two crops a year from Lattarula.

4 "Negronne"; aka "Bordeaux", "Violette de Bordeaux": 8+/10: Flat & mildly sweet in my taste tests, excellent according to others: 75x45mm x 60g: Black skin, white meat tinged violet, deep red flesh: Very upright growing tree.

4 "Petite Negri"; aka "Petite Negra": 7/10: Flat flavor lacking sweetness: Black skin, White meat, Red flesh: Droopy growing tree.

4 "Kadota"; aka "Dottato": This is a fig for California: mild: Green to yellowish skin, white meat tinged violet, amber pulp: Produces few or no Brebas at Riverside, CA & California coastal areas, bad choice for our area, this variety should not be grown here! Author knows of one tree that grew fine in a Tacoma greenhouse.

4 "Neveralla"; aka "Osborn Prolific" aka "Archipel": 2/10: medium: Bronze or violet-brown skin, white meat, white or light amber color pulp: Archipel and Rust are two distinctly different varieties, both of which have been called "Osborn Prolific". A Neveralla I knew of planted in the Newport Hills area of Bellevue produced so poorly it was replaced with Desert King. Not a good choice for here.

2 "Calimyrna"; aka "Sari Lop" aka "Lob Injir": Forget it, this is a Smyrna type fig for California which requires caprification to set a crop. It can't produce without *blastophaga* wasps: medium: Golden yellow to lemon yellow skin, white meat, pulp light strawberry colored: Seasonally available in some grocery stores as a fresh fig or more often dried.

4 "Black Mission"; aka "Mission" aka "Franciscana": Again, this is a fig for California: medium: Black skin, white or slightly violet meat, pulp is light strawberry colored: Not recommended for growing outside in the Pacific Northwest, this variety is best found in a grocery store as a fresh fig in season.