

# Fig

## Grow

### **Fig, Fruit, Flower and Family**

A fig is a sweet, juicy fruit. Fig plants grow as large shrubs or small trees. Figs are *Ficus carica* from the Moraceae or Mulberry family. Figs are grown over much of eastern North Carolina, the Piedmont, and foothills and into areas of the mountains.<sup>1-2</sup>

Fig plants are difficult to grow from seeds. The simplest method of propagating figs is by digging up and transplanting suckers. Additionally, take 8 to 10-inch long cuttings of one-year-old wood in early spring. Set the cuttings in a bed of loose soil, leaving one or two buds on the tip above the soil. Leave the cuttings to grow for 6 months and then permanently plant in the fall. Also, dormant fig plants or trees can be purchased from a nursery. Dormant, bare-rooted, nursery grown plants can be set anytime between late fall and early spring. Container grown plants should be planted just in the spring. Fig plants should be planted 10-25 feet apart. They prefer full sunlight and loamy soil.<sup>1,3</sup>

**Fun Fact:** The fig is actually an inverted flower. Fig plants produce an edible multiple fruit called a syconium.<sup>2,4</sup>

## Choose

Many varieties of figs exist. Popular fig varieties in North Carolina include the Celeste, Brown Turkey, and the Brunswick or Magnolia because they bear fruit without pollination. Celeste figs are purple or light brown on the outside and pink inside. Brown Turkey figs are coppery brown on the outside and amber inside. Brunswick figs are light brown on the outside and amber on the inside.<sup>1</sup>

Figs ripen June through August in North Carolina. Fresh figs should be soft and plump. Avoid bruised, moldy or dirty figs. Dried figs should have good color and be free of mold or insect damage.<sup>5</sup>

**Fun Fact:** The San Joaquin Valley in California grows 20% of the world's figs and 99% of United States figs.<sup>2</sup>



**Fun Fact:** Fig trees can produce 40-50 lbs. of fruit/year.<sup>2</sup>

## Store

Figs spoil quickly, so they are often dried, preserved or frozen. Fresh, ripe figs can be refrigerated for 1-2 days. They should be wrapped or covered well so that they do not pick up odors. Fresh figs can be frozen in a freezer safe resealable bag for 6 months. Dried figs can be kept for 1 year at room temperature or 6 months to 1 year in refrigeration. Store dried figs in an airtight container.<sup>5-6</sup>

**Fun Fact:** Did you know figs come from a diverse family of plants? Other members of the fig family include the ornamental rubber tree, the mulberry, and the Osage orange or hedge apple.<sup>1</sup>

## Use

Fresh or dried figs can be enjoyed as a side or snack. They can also be added to salads, yogurt, cereal or baked goods. Fresh figs are often made into preserves. Figs are delicate, so wash fresh figs gently under running water before eating or adding to recipes. Fruits become dry when their moisture content drops below 20 percent. Dried figs fully ripen and semi-dry on the tree. Some times, dried figs are soaked in liquid to soften them up before eating or adding to recipes.<sup>1-3,6</sup>

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## Teach

Figs come in many different sizes and colors. Figs can be white or golden, amber, green, brown, red, purple, or black. Depending on the color, figs will taste different. Green figs have a thicker skin and are juicy. Purple figs are the sweetest and juiciest, but they also spoil faster. Black figs are usually sweet and are more shelf stable.<sup>3,6</sup>

**Fun Fact:** Smyrna figs require a specific wasp species not found in North Carolina for pollination. As a result, Smyrna fig plants will not bear fruit if grown in N.C..<sup>1</sup>

### Class Activity - *Osmosis*

#### Materials Needed:

- 5 fresh whole figs + more for tasting
- 5 dried whole figs + more for tasting
- Scale
- Large plate or bowl to place figs on for weighing
- A bowl or container of water

#### Steps: *\*Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.*

Have students complete the following:

1. Estimate the weight of 5 fresh figs. Weigh 5 fresh figs on a scale. Record your estimation and the weight.
2. Estimate the weight of 5 dried figs. Weigh the dried figs on a scale. Record your estimation and the weight.
3. Place the dried figs in a bowl of water. Wait overnight. Record what time you put them in the bowl of water and what time you take them out.
4. Answer the following questions:
  - Do fresh figs weigh more?
  - What is the difference between the estimated and actual weight of the 5 dried figs?
  - What is the difference between the estimated and actual weight of the 5 fresh figs?
5. The next day, remove the dried figs from the water. Weigh the dried figs. Record the weight. Did the weight of the figs change after soaking them in water? Why or why not?
6. Use your senses to compare and contrast dried and fresh figs using a Venn diagram.

## Eat

Three fresh figs, about ½ cup, have 111 calories. They are cholesterol free and low in fat and sodium and have no added sugars. Fresh figs are a good source of fiber (15.5% of the Daily Value), copper (11.7% DV) and vitamin B6 (10% DV). Figs are also a source of lutein and zeaxanthin. Soluble fiber can help lower cholesterol. Insoluble fiber aids digestion. Copper serves as part of many enzymes. It helps your body produce energy in all body cells, develop connective tissue, myelin and melanin, and make hemoglobin which is needed to carry oxygen in red blood cells. Vitamin B6 helps our body make protein building blocks (amino acids), turn tryptophan into niacin and serotonin (a brain messenger), and make hemoglobin, insulin, and antibodies to fight infection. Lutein and zeaxanthin may help maintain normal vision.<sup>7-8</sup>

**Fun Fact:** Figs are thought to have originated from the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup>

### Class Activity - *Read About Figs*

#### Materials Needed:

- *Rosario's Fig Tree* by Charis Wahl
- *Under a Pig Tree: A History of a Noble Fruit* by Margie Palatini

#### Steps:

1. Read and discuss these books as a class.

## Find

For more fig facts and resources, visit:

1. N.C. State Extension, Fig Culture in North Carolina, [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu)
2. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
3. Clemson University Cooperative State Extension, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/fig/>
4. Texas A & M University Extension, <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/fruit/Figs/figs.html>
5. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov)
6. California Figs, <https://californiafigs.com/>
7. USDA FoodData Central, <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/index.html>
8. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)