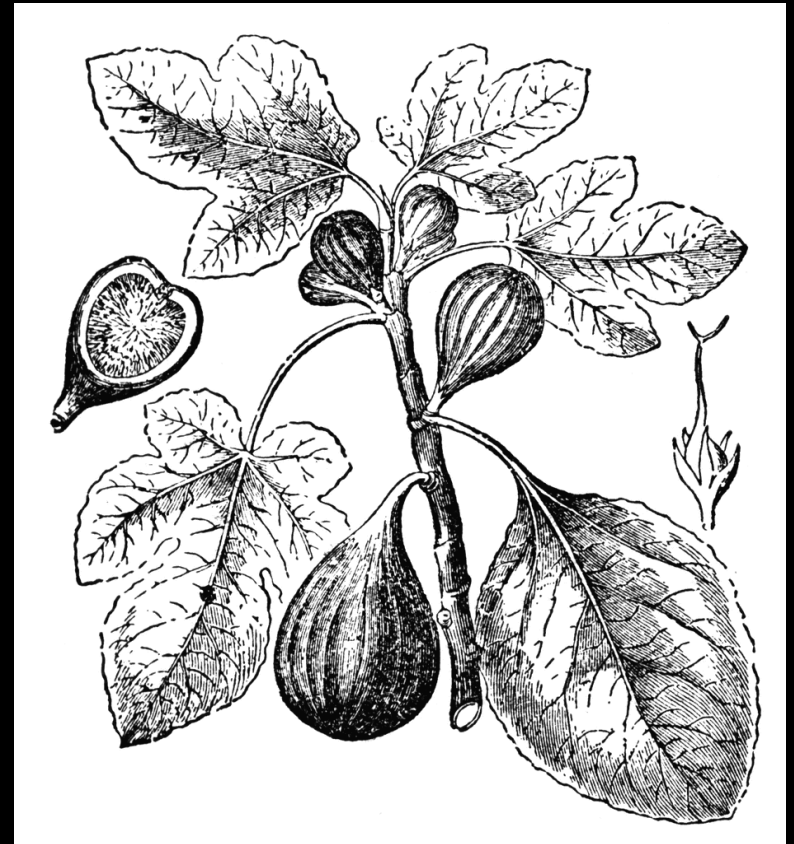


Growing Figs In Kentucky

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History

- *Ficus carica*, originated in Northern Asia
- Sumerian stone tablets record the usage of figs 2500 B.C., remnants have been found in excavations as far back as 5000 B.C.
- Spanish Missionaries brought them to the US in 1520
- Black Mission Fig named after a California Franciscan mission that dates to 1770



History

Mentioned in the bible prominently:

Jesus cursed the fig tree for not bearing fruit, it later withered and died! Matt 21:18

Jewish King Hezekiah used fig leaves to help cure an infection

James used the metaphor of fig leaves to show how “Christians” should live

The early church used fig leaves as covering for statues etc.

Scholars believe the forbidden fruit was actually a fig rather than an apple.....

History

- Greek Mythology, the fig had the blessing of sanctity of the Greek Gods
- Plato documented that figs were fed to the athletes at Olympia to increase their running speeds...Figs are 50% sugar so in essence they were candy bars!



Nutrition

- Figs contain potassium, fiber, omega-3 and 6, calcium, iron, etc.
- Figs contain pectin which is beneficial to the digestive system, it helps clear cholesterol
- Figs are said to help hypertension, boost brain function, treat anemia, help a sore throat, and help strengthen vision

100% Tasty!!!

More Facts



- In the family Moraceae
- Common name
Fig in English,
Higo (Spanish), Figue
(French), Feige
(German), Fico (Italian)
- Distant relative to the
Mulberry (*Morus*)

Site and Soil Requirements

- There are 470 varieties of common figs (only a handful or less that we can grow)
- Figs have very few problems in our climate (other than cold)
- Figs should be grown in well drained locations with full sun
- Figs in Kentucky or more like a small shrub than anything else, the term tree will not apply here! However in warm climates up to 100 feet tall!

Site Selection and Soil Requirements

- A protected location is best and an absolute must for most cultivars for fruit
- The south/west side of a building is an ideal location
- A reduction in cold damage can also be helped by reducing the amount of direct sunlight plants get early in the morning and late in the evening
- Figs do need at least 8 hours of full sun!



Soil Preparation and Planting

- Soil Test!!!
- Like most fruit crops figs prefer a pH of around 6.0-6.5
- Can be grown on a wide range of soils but good drainage is a must (add lots of organic matter)



Soil Preparation

- In Kentucky trees should be planted in the spring as potted plants either dormant or actively growing depending on the season (personal preference after May 1)
- Sometimes ordered plants may come bareroot.....



Planting

Soil not too wet

Large hole

Do not put
fertilizer in the
hole!

Put top soil back in
bottom of hole

Fig. 2

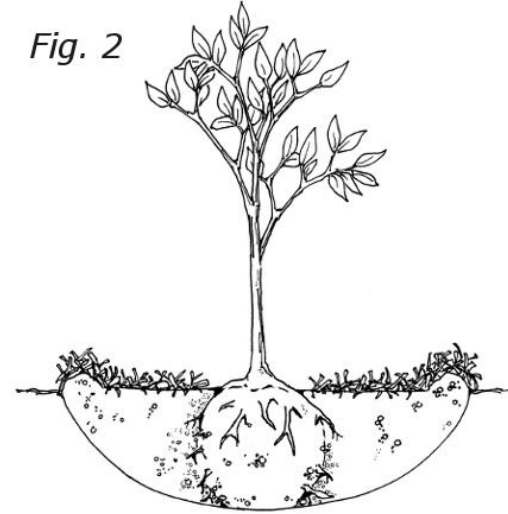


Fig. 3



Planting

Cut off broken roots

Place top soil in around roots...Do not bring in good soil to fill hole

Firm soil around plant

Water in good to settle soil around roots



Pruning

- Prune to form a bush, after the first season prune back 1/3 of the plant even if it didn't winter kill (this will encourage side branching and more fruit!)
- Generally in warm climates you would select leaders for future trunks to grow 4-8 inches in diameter but....
- Very little pruning required in Kentucky, basically an annual pruning out of cold damage wood, that's it!
- Sucker growth can get thick so that may need to be taken care of as well
- Late spring best time to prune
- Make all cuts back to a bud or branch to allow for quicker cut healing

Fertilization

- Figs will grow in poor soil but prefer rich(ish) loamy organic matter based soils
- Keep competition low by mulching around plants
- You should get a couple feet of growth, if not fertilizer is needed



Fertilizer Guidelines New Plants

- Use a fertilizer with an analysis of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10.
- For feeding plants one-to two-years-old, apply 1 oz of fertilizer each month from the beginning of growth through the end of July.



Fertilizer Guidelines

- Apply fertilizer to larger plants three times a year: late winter, early June, and mid-July.
- Use $\frac{1}{3}$ lb per ft of bush height per application.
- If the fruit are not reaching maturity and ripening properly, excess fertilizer or drought may be the problem and fertilization should be reduced.
- Increase the amount of fertilizer as the tree grows, up to 10 lb per year.

Fruiting

- Cultivars for Kentucky fruit mainly in mid to late summer into fall (you will probably have green figs on the plant that will get killed in the fall)
- Figs fruit from new growth (hint: if killed to the ground you can still get figs)



Fruiting



Which of these are we going to get in KY?



- Main crop of figs are produced on new wood (good for us)
- First fruiting on old or the previous seasons growth (poorer quality) ripens in early summer called breba's

Fruit

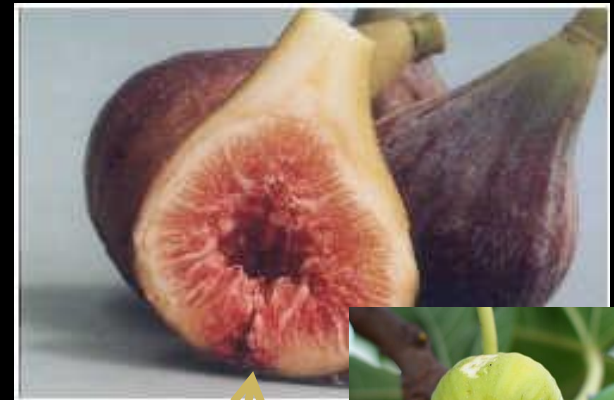
Multiple Fruit

Fig



Numerous achene-line fruits develop from flowers which bloom within fleshy covering

No pollination needed for fruit, which is basically inside out, the flowers are on the inside!



Ostiole or eye



So How Do We Get Figs In KY?

- Variety Selection!
- **Chicago Hardy!!!**

(Background)

Chicago can die to the ground and still regrow and produce a late summer/fall crop, other varieties will regrow but rarely have enough time to ripen



Other Varieties?

In containers and brought indoors or stored in protected places for winter, or?

- Brown Turkey
- Celeste



Foliage Types



Brown Turkey



Celeste



Chicago Hardy

Harvesting

- Harvest figs when their necks wilt and fruits droop, if the exude a milky latex stop picking they aren't ready
- The milky latex can cause an allergic reaction in some people.....

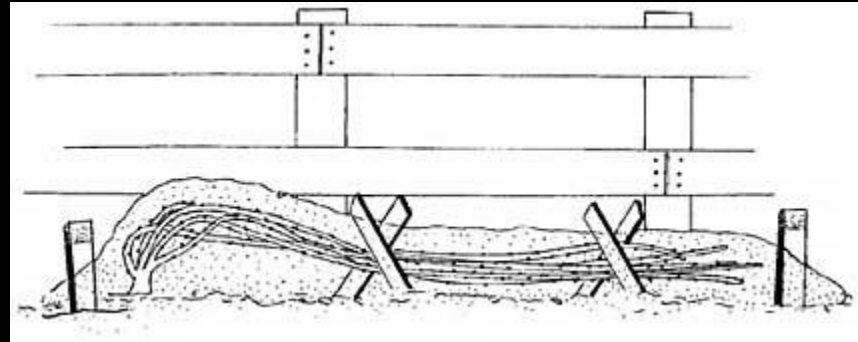


Preventing Cold Injury

- Select the right cultivar
- Plant to the south side of buildings
- Avoid late and over fertilization
- Mound soil or mulch over base of plant (like hybrid tea roses)
- Pull shoots to the ground, secure and cover with mulch
- Plant in 30-50 Gallon containers, move to a basement or garage for winter

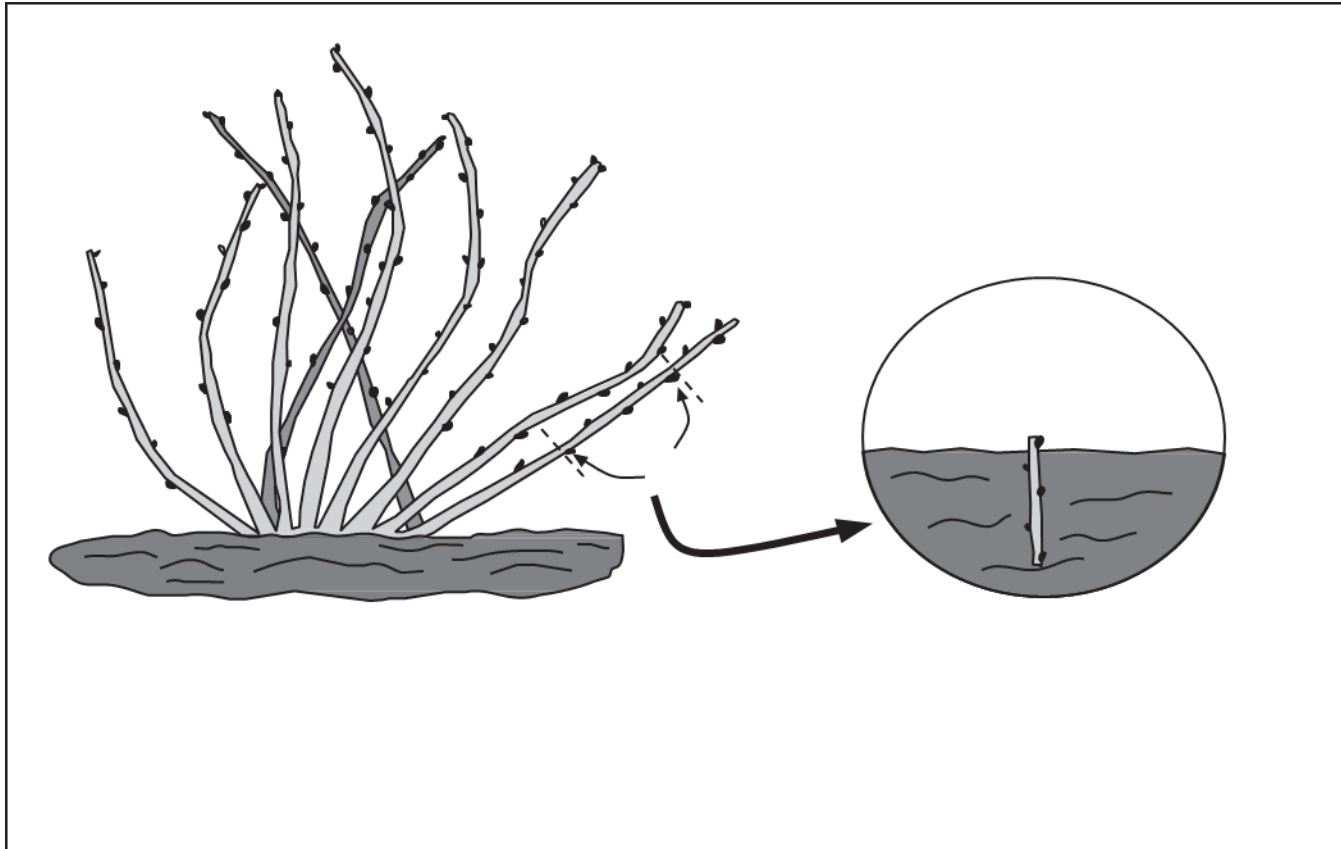
Preventing Winter Injury....

Treat them like roses but don't cut the tops back, we may not have cold enough weather to kill the tops every year!



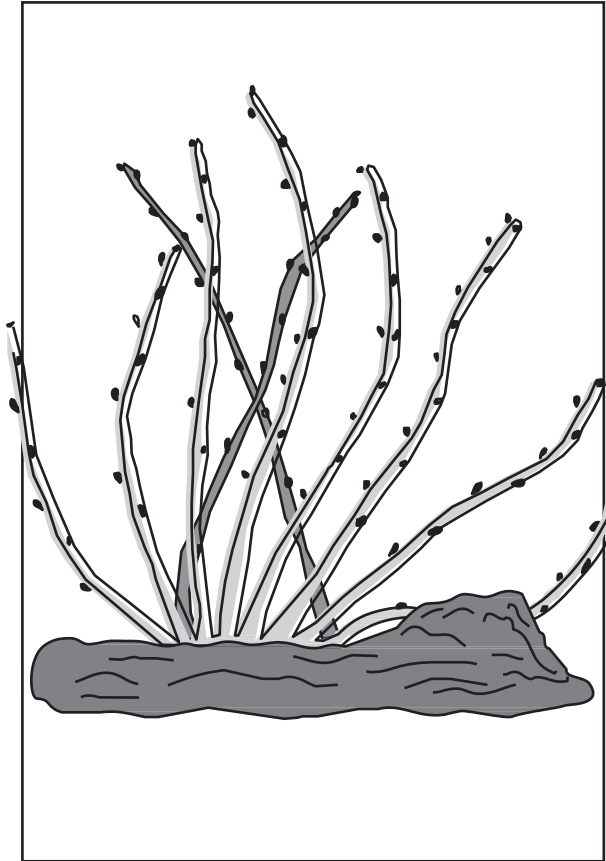
No need for
this with
Chicago
Hardy!

Easy Home Fig Propagation



Take cuttings in early March from older bushes, make sure branch doesn't have winter damage

Easy Home Fig Propagation



In early fall pull cane over bury in the middle, leave tip end out, rooting will occur at nodes below ground

Problems?

- Not really much insect or disease problems on figs in Kentucky
- Fruit Splitting is a problem however (keep evenly watered and fertilized)
- Ants and flies can enter the ostiole, open figs before eating just in case!



Birds can also be a problem, however I haven't had trouble yet.....but bird netting, old CD's, stress calls, etc.

Tips...

- For eating fresh pick when fully ripe (best flavor)
- For preserving pick a couple days before fully ripe, this will reduce damage from souring and splitting
- For drying allow fruits to remain on plant until fully ripe, they should fall into your hand when touched (lower water content in fruit at this point and highest sugar content)

<http://ucfoodsafety.ucdavis.edu/files/26389.pdf>

Questions?

