



Fruiting Fig Tree Care



In Northeast Ohio, **fruiting figs** (*Ficus carica*) are a semi-tropical delicacy. These small trees/large shrubs are native to the Mediterranean and western Asia, well-known for their large and fragrant, 3-5 deeply lobed green leaves, and 1-2" long, green, purple or brown fruits that contain wonderfully delicious and uniquely flavored, honey sweet, seedy flesh. Additionally, figs eaten fresh, dried or in preserves, provide a good source of dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals including B6, potassium, and manganese. The "common" types of figs that we grow are self-fruitful, requiring no pollinators or additional trees, forming fruit on new woody growth, and ripen late summer through autumn. Figs grow extremely well in large containers or in the ground, both **requiring winter protection***. Only marginally cold tolerant in Northeast Ohio, USDA Zones 5b-6b, (-15°-0° F), figs die to the ground in temperatures below 20°F.

Care: Figs require **full sun** conditions (6+ hours of direct sunlight), **well-drained, porous soil** amended with organic matter such as compost, manure, or planting mix that should be **slightly acidic** (pH 6.0-6.5). Plant figs at least 5-6' apart. Fertilize in spring and summer with **Plant-tone**. Water deeply 1-2" per week and apply 2" of **mulch** to retain soil moisture and reduce weeds. Use **frost cloth** to protect/extend your harvest into October. Harvest when the stem bends causing the fruit to droop. Cover with **bird netting** to discourage both critter and bird browsing. **Prune** when dormant; fruit is formed on new wood.

***Winter protection** begins in late Nov./early Dec., (around Thanksgiving), when leaves drop after experiencing at least two hard fall frosts, (temps. below freezing, 25-31°F), indicating dormancy. Petitti's top three methods of winter protection are:

1. Potted figs can be protected in a cold, **attached garage** over winter. Prune or tie-up branches as needed, water well, wrap the plant and pot in an old blanket or burlap, store in a dark corner, and water it lightly once a month in winter.
2. To protect upright, potted or planted figs **outside** or in an unattached garage or shed, after pruning or tying, insert a tall, 1" PVC pipe out the middle of the plant as a vent, wrap the entire plant, (and pot), with a home insulation blanket, then follow with heavy plastic. Place the wrapped, potted fig near a protected side of the home. Cover both the potted and planted fig's root base with 8-10" of leaves or mulch. Avoid plastic touching the fig or it will cause winter burn.
3. Digging around and partially severing the root system to **lay fig trees down** is another good protection method. Cover the tied branches with burlap/old sheets, then apply plywood or pallets on top to keep trees in place, and to lift plastic coverings off the fig's bark. Cover with insulation, then a heavy plastic tarp, and finish by securing the tarp with rocks or stakes. Uncover your fig trees in late winter/early spring, (around Easter), lift, untie, backfill with soil, and feed.

Fig Varieties: Angelo Petitti's favorite fruiting figs to try growing in Northeast Ohio, *availability may vary*.

Name	Fruit Size	Flavor	Comments
'Alma'	M	Rich, sweet	Pear shaped, golden brown skin & amber-pink pulp, very cold sensitive, produces good yields when young to very mature, ripen late, (Z8-9)
'Black Mission'	M-L	Excellent, sweet	Pear shaped, purple-black skin & red pulp, popular Spanish variety, (Z7-10)
'Brown Turkey'	M-L	Flavorful, mild sweetness	Bell shape, (40g), purple-brown skin & strawberry pink flesh, few seeds, dwarf habit = good for pots. Gets confused with or is similar/same as 'Texas Everbearing', yields 2-5 lbs. per mature plant with frost protection (Z6-10)
'Celeste'	S-M	"Sugar fig", fresh, dessert sweetness	Some cold tolerance, long neck, striped bronze-violet skin & rose pulp, (13g), excellent fresh, frozen, in preserves, ripens early, A.k.a. 'Celestial' (Z7-9)
'Chicago Hardy'	S	Excellent, peachy or fruity berry	Small, elongated neck, very sweet, low seed crunch (20g), brown-purple skin & red pulp, yields 1-3 lbs. per mature plant, (Z6-10)
'Desert King'	L	Mild, sweet strawberry jam-like	Rounded fruit, (50g), light green skin & red pulp, juicy, great all-around taste, very productive, (Z7-10)
'Lattarula'/ Italian Honey Fig	M	Mild, honey sweetness	Rounded bell shape, flat bottom, (30g), green-yellow skin & cream-light amber pulp, vigorous, compact & bushy. A.k.a. 'Blanche', 'Marseilles', 'Oregon Prolific', (Z6-9), Thomas Jefferson's favorite!
'Texas Blue Giant'	XL	Very sweet	Deep purple skin & dark amber pulp, ever-bearing, (Z6-10)