



## Growing Figs in New England

By Carl Johnson, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Figs are a delicious, exotic tasting fruit that many people don't know can be grown right here in Connecticut. Yes, our winters are too harsh for this warmer climate plant but with a little know how and some effort, you can grow a successful fig crop year after year.

While no one variety is completely resistant to the cold temperatures we experience as New Englanders, there are some varieties that are more resilient than others. Chicago Hardy, Brown Turkey, Celeste, and White Marseilles are just a few examples. Flavor preference is another factor to consider after cold hardiness. Figs range from light green, to brown, to dark purple, with some variation in size between varieties. If you're not sure what you like, you might try looking in the produce aisle of your local grocer and see if there's a range to sample from there. You might find that this is easier said than done; most grocery stores in New England will only carry figs seasonally and even then, it is a narrow selection. This only adds to the appeal for home gardeners wanting to produce their own crop during the warmer months. There is a large market for purchasing pre-established plants of all different fig cultivars. However, many fig enthusiasts choose to share cuttings among each other as this plant propagates easily.



Juicy ripe fig. Photo by Carl Johnson, 2021

Figs can be propagated via vegetative cutting with relative ease. Green cuttings tend to be less successful than woodier cuttings with the sweet spot being at about 1 year old. At that age, the propagule will have some woodiness to it but not so much that it is no longer pliable. Cuttings can be taken almost any time of year but semi dormant to fully leafed out branches are ideal. Some rooting hormone and placing shallow wounds on either side of the stem can go a long way towards rooting. Cuttings root out well in a well-draining media; some growers prefer rooting theirs out into sand. When propagating or dealing with figs in general, it is important to be aware of fig mosaic virus. Symptoms of this virus that are most commonly seen include mottled leaves and occasional misshapen fruit. To prevent the spread of this virus it is important that pruners and hands are sterilized between cuts and when moving from one plant to another.



Rooted cutting. Photo by Carl Johnson, 2021

This plant really thrives in a hot, full sun location. If you are planting in the garden or placing in a container, be sure to give them as much sun and warmth as possible. A relatively fast draining media will also go a long way towards producing a healthy fig crop as figs prefer not to remain wet for extended periods of time. Figs do well in moderately fertile soils with minimal need for fertilization in the garden. Plants grown in containers will experience a higher rate of nutrient leaching and therefore will require some fertilization during the growing season.

Figs are not adapted to our cold winters so measures must be taken to protect these plants during the cold season to ensure they survive to see spring again. Techniques for overwintering figs range in difficulty and complexity. The simplest option, which mainly applies to container plants, is to simply move them into a semi heated structure such as a garage or basement. This

can be done with plants that are in the ground by digging them up and wrapping the root ball. There are also several methods of mulching and wrapping that have been proven to be successful. Overwintering methods have been covered in depth by Dr. Charles R Vossbrinck at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. His article can be found on the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station website, a great resource for gardeners in our state.

For more info on gardening and growing other plants of interest here in the Northeast, please visit the UConn Home and Garden Education Center website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.