



Try growing and canning sweet and tasty figs

For those people interested in fruit production in Louisiana, figs should be on your list. Figs are ripening a little late this year, but it looks like a good crop.

One of my fond memories of childhood is opening the refrigerator door at my grandmothers and there would be bowls of freshly-cooked fig preserves. Fig preserves and biscuits are still one of my favorite breakfast treats. Figs are also very good fresh off the tree.

Figs are relatively easy to grow in most of your soil types. Like most plants, they do like to grow in a well-drained area. They're shallow rooted, like an azalea, and require a lot of water in droughty conditions and during fruit formation. Figs should be heavily mulched with organic materials such as leaves and pine straw to conserve moisture.

This year I had numerous calls back in the early summer about figs falling off the trees. That was a dry weather problem and watering and mulching was able to stop the fruit drop.

You should plant figs in an open area, not under other trees that will shade them out and rob them of needed moisture and nutrients. Space trees 10 to 20 feet apart to allow room for growth.

There are a number of varieties that are available but I will give you some of the recommend varieties for Louisiana:

Celeste is a very popular older variety which produces a small violet to brown fig with a light strawberry-colored pulp. The fruit has a closed eye which makes it resistant to splitting and souring. Celeste has very good fruit quality when used fresh, canned or preserved. The tree goes dormant early in the winter and is not that susceptible to freeze damage.

Brown Turkey produces small to medium sized copper to bronze-colored figs with amber to pink pulp. It has a medium open eye which makes it more susceptible to splitting and souring. The quality of the fruit is excellent as well as the production.

LSU Purple is an LSU release with medium sized red to dark purple figs with light strawberry-colored pulp. The fig quality is rated as good but tends to get better after 4-5 years. One drawback is that LSU purple has had poor cold resistance and has been hurt by freeze damage.

LSU Gold is a large yellow fig that is blushed with red and has light red to pink pulp. The fruit is of high quality, excellent flavor and good cold resistance. It does have an open eye which will allow for spoilage of fruit during period of high moisture while ripening.

Alma is a Texas release that comes in about two weeks later than Celeste. It comes into fruit production at an early age and produces a yellow to tan fig with a

light tan pulp with hints of pink. Alma has a medium open eye, but it produces a self-sealing gum that closes the eye. The fruit is very sweet and the tree is productive. Cold resistance is rated at poor to moderate and should only be grown in south Louisiana.

My wife and I used to carry on the family tradition of putting up figs but we no longer have a fig tree. We used my grandmother's recipe and it was simple. She would take approximately 2 quarts of figs for every 2 cups of water and 6 cups of sugar. She would make syrup with the water and sugar on a medium heat. After all the sugar had dissolved she would bring the syrup to a boil for a few minutes and then add the figs. Bring the heat up to a gentle boil and let them cook until clear or transparent. This takes about an hour and a half.

My grandmother would peel the figs, which I like, but it takes a long time and we don't peel them when we make preserves.

Hot biscuits and butter are required for eating with the figs, but if you have more than you can eat, get out your canning pots and jars. I think fig preserves are even better on a frosty morning.

More fig recipes and canning instructions are available in the LSU Ag Center Publication 3018, Louisiana Figs, which is available online at www.lsuagcenter.com; search for publication 3018. For more information on this or other topics, contact Kenny at 225-686-3020 or visit the parish website at www.lsuagcenter.com/livingston.

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