



# FIG TREE CARE SHEET

## FIG TREES (FICUS CARICA):

- Are easy to grow
- Do well in almost all types of soil
- Can be kept as small as 6' with regular pruning
- Are native to the Middle East and Western Asia
- Are a member of the Mulberry family

## While deciding where to plant your fig tree, remember that

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- Figs require a warm, sunny spot in order to produce good fruit.
- Plant where your fig tree will have plenty of space for roots as well as crown.
- Fig roots can clog clay or cement sewer pipes; plant tree at least 25' away.
- Gophers love fig roots! If you have gophers, place a wire gopher barrier in the planting hole to hold the root ball and protect it from sharp little teeth.
- Don't plant a fig tree where root-knot nematodes are a problem.

## Watering

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- Young fig trees should be watered regularly until fully established; recently planted trees are particularly susceptible to water deficits.
- Water mature trees deeply at least every 1 – 2 weeks.
- Mulch the soil around the trees to conserve moisture (but don't allow mulch to gather up around the tree's trunk).
- If a tree is not getting enough water, the leaves will turn yellow and drop.
- Drought-stressed trees will not produce fruit and are more susceptible to nematode damage.

## Pruning

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Prune annually during the first three growing seasons in order to establish your fig tree's desired shape—which in our mild-winter climate is usually a single-trunk, open-vase shape.

In subsequent growing seasons prune only to stimulate new growth or to control size. Figs can bear fruit in the fall on the previous year's growth, so heavy pruning will result in lighter crops the following season. For this reason it's best to prune immediately after the main crop is harvested in the fall.

Remove all weak, diseased or dead limbs each dormant season.

## **Fertilizing**

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In most environments, gardeners should only fertilize fig trees when the tree shows signs of low nutrients, such as slower growth (if the branches grew less than a foot the previous year), or lighter coloring in the leaves.

But in fast-draining, sandy soil, nutrients leach out quickly; a fig tree in this situation (which includes most of Alameda) requires several applications of fertilizer throughout the year.

Fig trees in densely-planted beds will be competing with other plants for nutrients; make sure the garden is kept well-fertilized but free of rank growth.

Fertilize your young tree in 1-ounce doses once a month as soon it produces leaves and stop fertilizing before August.

Established trees require less feeding, preferably 1/3 pound for each foot of height once at the end of winter, once halfway through spring and then a final fertilizing at the height of summer.

Either choose a fertilizer specially made for fruit trees or use an all-purpose 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 fertilizer (this contains a balance of 8 % or 10% N [nitrogen] P [phosphorus] and K [potassium]). Nitrogen encourages foliage growth. Phosphorus encourages the development of roots, flowers and fruits. Potassium strengthens the tree's resistance to disease.

## **Harvesting**

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Figs must be allowed to ripen fully on the tree before they are picked. They will not ripen if picked when immature. A ripe fruit will be slightly soft and starting to bend at the neck. Harvest the fruit gently to avoid bruising. Fresh figs do not keep well and can be stored in the refrigerator for only 2 - 3 days.

## **Pests**

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Birds and squirrels! They seem to know exactly when your fruit is perfectly ripe and pluck it away mere minutes before you make your way out to the tree. Using bird netting—especially when the tree is young and fragile branches need protecting—is one solution that does work.

## **References:**

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