Fig production in Virginia is limited mainly to the warm coastal areas. The plants are easily injured by cold and cannot be grown successfully without protection where winter temperatures frequently drop below 20° F. Figs require a minimum of care, and are included in many home plantings. A single plant will usually produce enough fruit for an entire family.

Varieties

Two varieties of figs are recommended for planting in Virginia. Both are good for eating fresh when fully ripe, and are excellent for preserving. A fair crop of fruit may be expected the second year after planting.

Celeste - This variety develops into a large bush or small tree. It is vigorous, very prolific, and relatively hardy to cold when fully dormant. The fruit ripens in late July and early August in the Norfolk area. It is pear-shaped, medium to small in size, with purplish-brown skin and reddish-pink pulp when ripe. It cracks very little in wet weather and is of good quality.

Brown Turkey - Although less vigorous than Celeste, this variety is equally as hardy to cold. If injured by freezing, it will produce a fair crop of fruit on sucker wood the following season. Brown Turkey begins ripening with Celeste, but continues over a longer period. The fruit is medium to large, with a reddish-brown skin tinged with purple. The pulp is reddish-pink and of good quality. It is subject to cracking in wet weather, and sours more quickly than Celeste.

Establishing and Planting

Figs grow best in deep, fertile loam soils well supplied with organic matter. Satisfactory crops may be produced, however, in soils ranging from coarse sand to heavy clay. They do well in high lime soils and can be grown in higher concentrations of salt than most fruits. Figs have an extensive feeder-root system near the surface, and will root as deeply as 5' or more where soil conditions permit.
Figs should be planted where they will receive full sunlight most of the day and where competition for moisture and nutrients will not be severe. They may be planted against the south sides of buildings in areas where they need protection from cold.

Fig plants may be purchased from a reliable nursery or are easily produced from cuttings. In early spring, when danger from freeze injury is over, select from the previous season's growth straight, vigorous wood about 3/4" in diameter. Make cuttings 8 to 10" long with the basal cut just below a node. Transplanting may be eliminated if desired by rooting directly in permanent locations with only the top bud of each cutting remaining above the ground.

Set one-year-old plants in early spring when danger from freeze injury is over. Allow at least 12' between plants. Dig the holes deeper and wider than necessary to accommodate the roots, leaving the soil loose in the bottom of the hole. Do not allow the roots to dry out during the planting operation. Set the plants 2-4" deeper than they grew in the nursery, and firm the soil carefully about the roots. Cut the top back to a height of about 2 feet.

Pruning and Training

Figs may be trained to a tree or bush form or as espaliers against a wall or trellis. The bush form is the most practical for Virginia, as danger of freezing back to the ground makes the tree and espalier forms difficult to maintain.

Cutting the top back to about 2' at the time of planting forces shoots to grow from the base of the plant. These should be allowed to grow through the first season. Just before growth begins the year after planting, select 3 to 8 widely spaced, vigorous shoots to serve as leaders and remove all the others. The selected leaders should be far enough apart to allow a growth of 3 or 4" in diameter without crowding.

Subsequent pruning involves little more than removal of the dead wood and sucker growth not needed for replacement of the leaders. Some heading back may be necessary to keep vigorous leaders within bounds. All pruning cuts should be made to a bud or branch, leaving no stubs to serve as entry points for wood decay organisms.

Culture and Fertilization

Mulching is a recommended cultural practice for figs. Hay, corn cobs, sawdust, peanut hulls, pine needles, or other coarse organic matter is satisfactory. As some roots grow on the surface of the soil under a mulch, it should be at least 4 to 6" deep and extend slightly beyond the end of the branches. Where mulch is not applied, very shallow cultivation to control weeds and conserve moisture may be necessary.

Figs are vigorous growing plants and usually produce good crops without fertilization. Nutrient deficiencies seldom occur except on soils of very low fertility, or where competition from other plants is heavy. Where the need is indicated, apply a total of 1 lb annually of a complete fertilizer such as 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 for each foot of height. Spread evenly around the plant from the trunk to the limb drip in 3 equal applications—late winter, early June, and late July.
For highest yields of quality fruit, figs should not be allowed to suffer for moisture during the ripening period. During periods of drought it may be necessary to thoroughly water the root zone at 7- to 10-day intervals.

Pest control is usually limited to the practice of good sanitary measures. Prune and burn dead and dying wood; remove and destroy fallen leaves, fruit, and other trash.

**Harvesting**

For eating fresh, figs should be picked when fully ripe. For canning or preserving, they should be ripe but still firm. Fruit picked too green never ripens. It lacks flavor and is frequently bitter.