



## FIG TREE GROWING GUIDE

Congratulations on becoming an owner of a new fig tree!

Below is a quick guide to getting your tree established and some tips for how to avoid common problems. More information is available at [fourwindsgrowers.com](http://fourwindsgrowers.com). Now that you have unpacked the tree, be sure to remove the plastic bag that keeps the soil in place for shipping.

### **Location:**

Fig trees are an excellent choice for both in-ground and container growing. Choose a location with at least 8 to 10 hours of sunlight. Fig trees will thrive in a variety of soil types but for the best results, you will want to plant your tree in a location with good drainage. When growing in the ground, avoid planting your tree up against the house as they have wide-spreading root systems.

### **Planting:**

To plant your fig tree in the ground, dig a hole deep enough to cover the root ball. We recommend digging a hole in a cone shape that is about twice the size of the current root mass and planting the tree to the center of the cone. If your location has heavy clay soil create a mound about 12" above the native soil line with a better draining soil mix of compost and mulch. At the center of the mound, dig a cone-shaped hole and plant your tree.

For container growing, you will want to create a soil mix that is 5-parts coarse bark, 1-part coarse perlite, and 1-part premium potting soil. This soil mix is designed for maximum drainage which reduces the chances of root disease.

When transplanting check for roots collecting at the bottom of the pot. Gently loosen up the roots at the bottom to help them quickly extend into the surrounding soil.

Tamp (pack) down soil several times while backfilling the hole to avoid air pockets. After planting, water the tree to settle the soil firmly around the roots. Make a basin for future watering.

### **Watering:**

The number one reason for fig loss in the first 2 years is poor draining soils. Become familiar with how your location drains and mound up to 12 inches above the soil line where drainage is poor. Figs are quite drought tolerant once establish but water management in the first 2 years is critical.

Good water management includes regular irrigation and mulching to get trees established. Regular irrigation on established figs helps to improve size and juiciness. Once established figs require little water.

### **Fertilizing:**

In general, fig trees do not require regular fertilizing. Excessive applications of nitrogen can have a negative effect on fruit quality. The one exception is for figs grown in containers, which should be fed three or four times a year with a balanced fruit tree fertilizer.

### **Compost:**

A thick layer of compost applied to your soil either around your fruit trees is an effective way to improve fertility immediately and over the long term as the compost breaks down. Compost comes in many forms and strengths. You may be inclined to jump for the strongest composted chicken manure but will burn your tree. Stick to well-composted steer, horse manures, or a blend of plant compost as they provide ample nutrients for trees without the risk of burning them.

### **Pruning:**

Unpruned fig trees can spread 25' or more. Figs will produce a thick dense canopy with little pruning. Figs can be held to any height with regular pruning. They make an ideal plant for espalier or as a patio container plant. Many varieties bear an early crop called a "Breba" crop usually in early summer. The main fruit sets on the current season's growth. Once all the foliage has dropped for winter, you will want to prune out all the dead, damaged or diseased wood as well as any spoiled fruit that may still be hanging on the tree.

### **Cold Weather Protection:**

Fig trees are most susceptible to cold injury when going into dormancy. Small young trees are particularly sensitive to freezing temperatures and care should be taken to protect or delay planting until all danger of frost has passed. A mature tree when totally dormant can

withstand much colder temperatures. However, this varies by variety and care should be taken to select varieties that are suited to your area. Some varieties of figs can withstand temperatures as low as -10 degrees

After freeze damage occurs, give the tree ample time to grow before removing the frozen limbs. Prune frost-damaged branches in the spring once the threat of heavy frost has passed.

### **Mulch:**

The use of mulches will conserve precious water and help inhibit weed growth. A 2-3 inch layer of wood chips, fir bark, compost, or other organic matter can be very helpful for water retention. "Living mulches" such as nitrogen-fixing clovers can also be planted between trees in an orchard. To avoid root diseases, always keep grasses and other vegetation away from the root collar area. Keep all mulches at least six inches away from the base of the trunk. For growers in cold climates, an extra thick 8"-10" layer of mulch around the base of the tree just before winter acts as a layer of insulation that will help keep your roots alive over winter. Figs are unique in that they fruit on the current year's growth so even if the tree dies back to the ground over winter, so long as the roots are protected, the trees will grow back the following season and set fruit.

### **Harvesting:**

Some varieties of figs can bear two crops per year. The first crop, known as the breba crop, is produced in the spring on the previous year's growth. The second, main crop is produced in the fall on that year's growth.

For best quality, allow figs to ripen on the tree, and pick as they become somewhat soft. Some areas such as the southern seaboard of the United States deal with on-the-tree spoilage or souring caused by microorganisms in the fully ripe fruit. These organisms are usually carried into the open eye of the fig by insects, particularly the dried fruit beetle. Frequent harvest and the removal of overripe, spoiled figs can greatly reduce spoilage problems. Selecting varieties that have a "Closed Eye" will easily deal with the problem.