

Ficus carica

Moraceae

N.W. Turkey, common eastern

Mediterranean

Am: *Beles*

Eng: *Adriatic fig, Common fig, Smyrna fig*

Km: *Odeko*

Ecology

Figs originate from dry areas with a marked seasonal climate and perform best in areas with a long, hot growing season. They can withstand dry periods and need a cold period of 100–300 hours below 7 °C. In spite of this requirement for chilling, they are sensitive to frost. They do not perform well in humid areas. Fig trees grow from sea level to over 2,000 m in different parts of the world. The tree grows in a variety of soils, ranging from sandy loams to clay loams. It even tolerates soils high in lime and poor soils, but not those that are too acidic. In Ethiopia, fig trees grow in Dry and Moist Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones in Shoa and Harerge, 1,000–2,400 m.

Uses

Fruit (fresh, dried), medicine (sap).

Description

A markedly deciduous shrub or small tree 4–10 m tall. **BARK:** Brown. White latex in all parts irritates the skin. **LEAVES:** Simple but with 3–5 rounded lobes to 18 x 20 cm, heart-shaped at the base, leaf edges slightly toothed at lobe tips, 3–5 veins from the base, a leaf stalk to 10 cm. **FRUIT:** Figs from female flowers, green-brown and swollen, to 7 cm, wider at the tip. The pulp around the seeds has a high sugar content and is very tasty.

Propagation

Figs grow easily from cuttings. Plants raised from seed vary in fruit quality and are thus not recommended. Use hardwood

cuttings of one-year-old wood from selected cultivars. Plant cuttings 25–30 cm long almost completely buried in well-drained soil and keep moist. Plant at a distance of 6 m x 6 m. Figs may also be propagated from rooted suckers severed from the parent tree and transplanted. Water the newly planted figs if necessary during hot, dry seasons.



Seed

Not used.

Treatment: Not applicable.

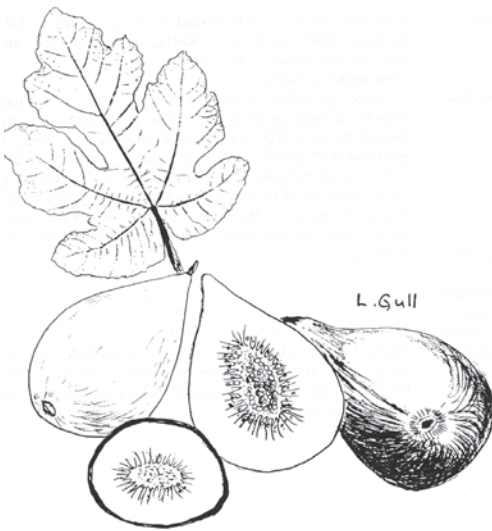
Storage: Not applicable.

Management

Heavy root pruning may sometimes induce fruiting. Prune branches to reduce size of trees for easier picking. Mulch with well-rotted manure once a year. If introducing figs into a new area, use Adriatic figs or other modern cultivars that do not require pollination by the fig wasp. These varieties have seedless figs that develop without pollination (parthenocarpically).

Remarks

Figs in the open are usually problem free, but birds may attack the fruit. Fruit flies may also damage the figs. *Nectria canker* causes small areas of bark, often close to a bud or wound, to darken and sink inward; the bark cracks form loose, flaky, concentric rings. Death of tissue under the surface bark (phloem) restricts the flow of water and nutrients, resulting in stem and leaf deterioration. A whole branch may die. The fungus *Nectria galligena* causes this problem. Ripe (soft) figs are harvested and consumed fresh. A small crop may be produced only a year after planting. Later there are two crops a year. Fruits ripen gradually at different times, so picking should be done daily during the fruiting season. The fruits are perishable unless sun dried. Figs are a good source of calcium and are high in fibre. They are also rich in natural sugars (83% of weight of dried figs) and contain vitamins A, B and C. Figs are popularly known for their laxative and digestive properties. In Ethiopia, the sap is used to encourage regrowth of hair in baldness due to 'lash' (Am.), a skin disease.



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