

Figs – A Rich History

Figs are an ancient fruit, prized by many civilizations. They are believed to originate in Asia and spread around the world by plant collectors and travelers. The Spanish are believed to have introduced figs to the Americas in the mid-eighteenth century.

Figs are cold sensitive and limited to growing in areas where temperatures do not get down into the teens, as trees would sustain severe damage. Commercial fig production in Texas has largely been unsuccessful, with the exception of backyard trees.

Figs are ripened on the tree and are quite perishable. This explains the protective boxes normally seen in grocery stores displaying figs for sale. It also explains part of the pricing, along with the very limited production areas.

We may not be the best spot in the country for growing figs, but we do have the benefit of warm weather. They are sensitive to drought stress and will require water during our summer months and, to some extent, during the winter months as well. So, commercial plantings are not likely to occur in south Texas, but we might grow figs for our family use, keeping in mind that they can not be drought stressed.

Figs contain phyto-nutrients, anti-oxidants and vitamins A, F, and K, that help protect us from cancer, diabetes, and degenerative diseases, as well as, infections. Figs are low in calories and are high in calcium, potassium, and iron. They also contain copper, manganese, selenium and zinc.

Two varieties of figs are usually recommended for this area: Celeste – a small brown fig and Alma a lighter colored fruit with a rich flavor. Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service has a new publication on figs with the latest information on varieties. For more information on figs, go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu> and click on “Fruits and Nuts,” then select the new fig publication. This Extension publication has more information on the various varieties available on the market.

We will have figs at the Grow’n Growers Farmers Market today, located at Firemen’s Park, First Street and Business 83 in McAllen, from 8:30 until 11:30 a.m. We will also have several other fruits, including blackberry, watermelon, cantaloupe, passion fruit, banana and papaya today. We also have a large variety of vegetables, farm fresh eggs, organic chocolate, fresh juice, and a large variety of fresh herbs and edible flowers. These are all grown without chemicals and are harvested just hours before the market.

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