

# Steven Biggs

Helping you grow figs in cold climates



## Yes, You Can Grow Figs!

Where you think you can't...in cold climates

FOODGARDENLIFE.COM

# WHY GROW FIGS?

Unlike many plants that need a warm location in front of a bright window for the winter (the bright window that most gardeners only wish they had!!) fig plants can go dormant and withstand cold—even freezing—temperatures.

*This means that even if you don't have a greenhouse or a big, bright window, you can still grow figs in a cold climate.*

## More Reasons:

- For black thumbs, figs are very forgiving
- Figs from the grocery store don't compare to homegrown figs because figs picked early for shipping never fully ripen
- Figs plants are beautiful



# HOW FIGS GROW

A fig tree is naturally bushy. But you can choose what you want it to look like.

*Prune it to a form that best suits you:*

- bush
- tree
- cordon or fan

The crop on wood from the previous year is the “breba” crop; it usually ripens in late July here in Toronto.

The crop on wood from the current year is the “main” crop; it ripens here in Toronto in September and October.



# WHERE TO GROW FIGS

## In the Ground

Plant them in the ground and protect them over the winter.



In-ground fig tree.

## Containers

Or, plant them in containers and store in a protected spot over the winter.



Potted fig tree.

# WINTER: POTTED FIGS

**Goal:** Keep the plant dormant until spring.

*Where?* In a cold cupboard or cold cellar, in an attached garage, or in an insulated outbuilding.

Ideally, somewhere dark, with a temperature between  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $23^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and  $7^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $45^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

*Or,* overwinter potted figs outdoors, covered with an insulating material such as soil or a mulch.



Dormant potted fig trees.



Dormant potted figs in a trench.

# WINTER: IN-GROUND FIGS

Bend and bury plants growing in the ground.

Or, cover them with a temporary insulating structure for the winter. (E.g. an insulated A-frame.)

Step-over fig cordons with a low, horizontal trunk are easy to mulch over the winter.



Step-over fig.

**REMEMBER:** There is no “right” way. Be creative! Find a way to moderate winter temperature extremes that works in your garden.

# HARVEST

*Signs a fig is ready to pick:*

- The neck becomes soft
- The fruit droops
- The impression of your fingertips remains on the fruit
- There is a drop of nectar coming out of the eye
- The skin tears



“Nectar” coming from the eye of a ripe fig.

If picked too early, you will see milky sap.

# TROUBLESHOOTING

**Water.** Overwatering of dormant potted figs causes root rot.

**Water.** Underwatering potted figs in summer causes fruit and leaf drop.

**Feeding.** Potted plants require feeding. Forgetful gardeners can use a slow-release feed. Many fig enthusiasts use a tomato feed; but a general-purpose, balanced feed works well.

**Pests.** Thievery by squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, and other fig lovers (in my case, my kids!). Motion-sensitive sprinklers help deter raccoons and mesh bags keep squirrels and birds at bay.



## Troubleshooting Continued...

**Diseases.** Rust gives ragged-looking leaves if the weather is conducive to it.

**Diseases.** The fig mosaic virus is a widespread disease found in many commercially available plants and collections. It is not always visible, nor can it be treated. While unsightly, nothing can be done to cure it. Affected plants often outgrow the problem if growing conditions are good.

**Figs that don't ripen in the fall.** Speed up harvest with an earlier start in the spring, a variety that fruits earlier, a hot and sunny location, and radiated heat from walls and patios.

**More on how to grow figs:**

**READ MORE**





## STEVEN BIGGS

FOUNDER, FOOD GARDEN LIFE MEDIA

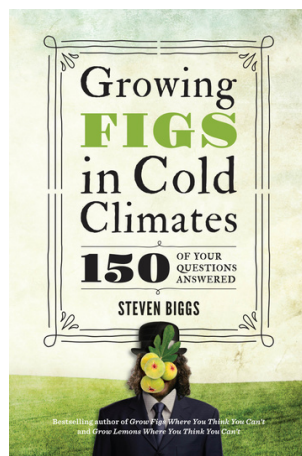
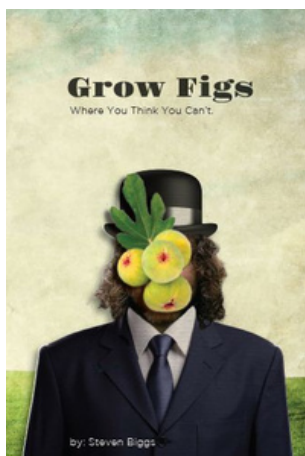
Recognized by Garden Making magazine as one of the “green gang” making a difference in horticulture, Steven’s passion is helping people grow food. He’s the author of the award-winning book *Grow Figs Where You Think You Can’t*, and *Growing Figs in Cold Climates: 150 of Your Questions Answered*. As well as being an avid fig grower and horticulturist, he’s interview fig growers far and wide for his radio show, podcast, books, and articles in Garden Making and Fine Gardening magazines. He holds an annual live Fig Camp, and also has an online self-paced Growing Figs in Cold Climates masterclass.

# MORE FIG RESOURCES

## Articles



## Books



## Course

### Grow Figs in Cold Climates

Grow your own figs. Find out how to grow a fig tree in a pot, or outside with protection. *So you can harvest lots of figs!*

