

Ficus carica, the common fig

Growing on Cape Cod

These are subtropical plants native to the Mediterranean region growth zone 7-11. They can be grown here on Cape Cod successfully(7a,7b).

They require full sunlight and thrive in our warm dry summers. Watering daily during hot days, but don't like their feet wet. Avoid completely drying out and marked drooping of leaves. Right size pot you should only need once daily AM watering.

Soil, rich organic with a good balance of moisture retention but well drained. Pine bark, peat or coco coir, coarse perlite mixes work well. Compost top dressing. Figs can root at any node so they can be planted "deep".

Fertilize with a balanced or slightly higher phosphorus sustained release product in May or June(2 tbsp for each 15 gallon pot) They also love daily watering with dilute fish fertilizer throughout the growing season until September. Careful not to use nitrogen heavy formulations after June, or excessive growth at the expense of fruit the result. Formulations with label "tomato" are slightly higher in phosphorus(2/4/2).

Figs grow vigorously. Plants started from 8-10" cuttings started in January or February may be 6-8' tall by September! Tips can be pinched back to limit growth and encourage fruit set.

Fruit usually produced by year 2-3, but sometimes even in the first year.

Figs can be planted in the ground with soil amendments particularly with sandy soil. Use growing mix as above to amend for water retention and nutrient exchange. Fertilize as above.

Inground plants should be winter protected with non-porous material such as plastic or a tarp, fill with leaves for insulation. Necessary? Some winters no but absolutely with a colder than usual season(like 2025-26 winter). Like

hydrangea, established lignified wood more cold hardy than recent green growth. Also like hydrangea, need protection from cold dry wind.

Figs overwinter well in pots that are brought in after a couple of hard frosts, leaves will fall off. Typically, early to mid-December and brought into an unheated garage or shed. Ideally 30-45F, NOT WARMER, NOT IN YOUR HOUSE. They need to be checked for moisture monthly during the winter but mine never need water while in dormancy. Trees are best pruned in dormancy, second week of December until March, cuttings for propagation.

Plants are moved back outside in late March or early April as buds swell and leaves form in FULL SUNLIGHT. They will need to be moved back in briefly if a hard frost is predicted. Leaves that form fully indoors tend to sun scald when put out in full sunlight setting the plant back. New cuttings or inside plants will need 3 weeks or more part shade to harden off to the sun. Early starts are essential for getting fruit to ripen before cool fall temps end the season.

When plants are moved out and before fully leafed out, good time to check for being pot bound. Circling roots need to be cut and “birds nest” at bottom of pot trimmed away. Pruning blade on reciprocating saw works well for this, or use serrated bread knife. Add new media, consider larger pot. They can be grown in 5 gallon pots, happier in 15 gallon. Five gallon pots need root prune/soil refresh yearly, 15s every other year.

Good Luck!

Rich Trimble

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