Fig varieties: a monograph

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Abstract
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Introduction
The common fig occurs in a great number of varieties, which have evolved mainly as natural seedlings during the many centuries in which this fruit has been under cultivation. As early as the fourth century B.C., (Theophrastus (1916)) reported that most good fruits, including the fig, had received names. Ulysses, the hero of the Odyssey, obtained from his father twenty fig trees, all with names. In the first century of the Christian Era, (Pliny (1855)) listed twenty-nine varieties, with the localities in which they were grown, and quoted Cato, who also had given names to several varieties. Pliny further stated: "Since his [Cato's] day there have been so many names and kinds come up, that even on taking this subject into consideration, it must be apparent to everyone how great are the changes which have taken place in civilized life."

Various authorities maintain that certain figs now being grown in Italy are directly descended by asexual propagation from the clonal varieties listed by Pliny, and are therefore identical with them. Barnissotte, for example, is referred by Gallesio to "Fico Africano" of Roman times. The Mission (Franciscana) fig of California, which was introduced into the New World over four hundred years ago by the Spanish explorers, had undoubtedly been previously propagated in southern Spain for many centuries.

Pliny listed names of figs and gave the color of mature fruits, but did not describe varieties in detail. Porta, in his Pomarium of 1583 and his subsequent much larger work of 1592, did little more than list varieties of that period, but he gave citations to previous authorities on synonymy. Beginning with Aldrovandi in 1668, and more specifically with Cupani in 1696, the accounts were sufficiently detailed to enable later writers to compare characters and to identify varieties with more or less certainty. Subsequent accounts or descriptions of fig varieties are numerous, as shown in the appended bibliography. Many have been purposely omitted from this monograph because

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Figs (Ficus carica) are popular fruit trees; hundreds of varieties are commonly grown in the warmer parts of North America. Figs are hardy in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 8 through 10, although some varieties can withstand winters in USDA zones 6 and 7 with proper protection and care.

Although they are relatively easy to grow, figs have a complex reproductive process, and some types of fig produce fruit with less effort than others. Caprifigs are a type of fig tree that produces an inedible fruit. Although they're not useful as fruit producers on their own, they can be used to pollinate other fig varieties.

See the difference between common varieties of figs from ultra-sweet Black Mission Figs to the bright red interiors of Adriatic figs. Figs—From Adriatics to Kadotas. Varieties of Figs. Photo © Patrizia Savarese/Getty Images. Fresh figs are remarkably fragile (ripe ones often split open with juicy goodness even when left completely alone!). For that reason, it's best to harvest figs when they're still green and let them ripen indoors.

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Reason, local figs are often the only fresh figs a person can buy without edging into the world of wilted, semi-spoiled specimens, or, just as bad, fruit picked before it's ripe. And yet, finding locally grown figs can be tricky outside of California, even though they can be grown anywhere with winter temperatures that don't drop below 20°F (learn more at All About Figs). Within the Sardinian fig germplasm, more than thirty varieties have previously been described and characterized in their main morphological characters. Most of them are autochthonous and all are of the "common type". A collection field was established, where all the fig varieties are maintained and evaluated under controlled conditions. Characterization of germplasm fig varieties has been conducted by means of isozymes electrophoresis on horizontal starch gel applied on cork tissue.