

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF FIGS

When it comes to fig trees, everybody has a "Fig Story." We've heard them all, "my grandfather had a fig tree in Brooklyn," they will start, "that was so big that it took 8 people to wrap up every November with rope, straw, carpets and tar paper." Then every May they repeated the unwrapping process to get it ready for summer. If you listen closely they will always say that, "grandpa's tree" or "their father's tree" always had figs as big as Bosc pears or Bartlett pears.

What you are really hearing are *childhood memories*. They were viewing the figs through the eyes of a child. Remember when you were a kid, everything looked big! And that's where all those colossal figs came from, the eyes of a child.

Eighty-five percent of the fig trees in Brooklyn and Queens were Italian ever-bearing or Brown Turkey figs. The black figs were Black Mission figs and most of the white figs were Kadota figs.

These four varieties were the "Pioneer" varieties so to speak, because they produced figs in moderately hot summers and bumper-crops in very hot long summers, giving two crops a year.

If you are buying a fig tree for the first time, it would be wise to stick to these four proven varieties because when these fig trees reward you with their delicious flavor and individual taste, you will be hooked and then, and only then will you be ready to try some of the ethnic varieties from around the globe!

Figs come in different sizes, shapes and colors. White ones, black ones, purple ones, purple-reds, green and reddish-brown. Some are large, some medium and some small. Some pear-shaped, some round, some long and narrow. Some have red, white, amber or strawberry colored centers. One thing they all have in common are they are all sweet and delicious! There are no sour figs.

Figs require hot weather to ripen. Some fig trees give two crops a year. Some need long hot summers with plenty of 90 degree days like the summer of 1995. With figs and grapes you have your good years and bad years. The weather is the boss. Some varieties will produce figs with a minimum amount of hot weather and others require the very, very long, hot summers to produce ripe figs. Fig lovers are always looking for new varieties. Figs that might be a little bigger or a little sweeter or a more prolific bearer.

Fig lovers are a certain breed, they can't get enough varieties. They become fig collectors. They can't get enough of them! We have over 200 customers who have anywhere from 12 to 25 fig trees of different varieties. These are serious fig collectors!! These fig trees are their babies, their sweet-hearts. They know they may not eat figs from all their trees every year, but they also know when the long, hot summers come, they stand to reap the rewards for all their years of waiting. It's like the old Brooklyn Dodgers *wait until next year!* One long hot summer usually makes up for three medium hot summers.

**PLEASE READ AND FOLLOW
INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.
DO NOT IMPROVISE.**

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NO GUARANTEE ON FIG TREES—FIG TREE QUESTIONS, ASK FOR "CHRIS"

ital everbear - weeping

In praise of the fig's many splendors.

MAYBE you have to have roots in the old country to love a fig the way she should be loved.

"This is Pop's tree," said Chris DiPaola, standing by an Italian Purple Red. "She's 23 years old." Pop's tree grows out of a whisky barrel, and her branches are like sturdy arms raised to the sky. Mr. DiPaola has pruned her in a vase shape, by taking out the stems in the center.

"To me, a fig tree is a woman," Mr. DiPaola said. He gestured gallantly toward Pop's tree and the little green figs already hanging from her stems. "It's graceful; it produces. I don't know why you would call it a he."

She is growing in Plainville, LI, in the back of Belleclare Nursery, which is owned by the DiPaola brothers, Chris and Bill.

Pop, the late William DiPaola Sr., started Belleclare 36 years ago when he was still laying eggs on the farm across from the nursery at 671 Old Country Road. He and his wife, Benedetta, had picked figs as children on the terraced limestone slopes of Formica, which overlooks the Gulf of Gaeta.

"There are so many figs there, you just help yourself from the trees," Chris DiPaola said. "By the second harvest, people just don't want to pick any more." They lie there, rotting on the ground. Unbelievable.



And what is the taste of a fig?

"It has a thick, sweet flavor," Mr. DiPaola said. "You can't call it juicy, but it's mouthwatering when you take a bite. Taste a fresh one, and you'll have to grow one."

Belleclare has become a kind of international exchange for figs from all over the world.

"One of my customers has a Greek black fig growing a few thousand feet from the water on the South Shore in Bellefonte," Mr. DiPaola said. "This tree is not sheltered by the house. It can take salt spray." His voice was reverent. "Nine years running, including that bad winter we had four or five years ago."

Mr. DiPaola sells Brown Turkey: Green whites, greens and blacks; Italian whites; Black Mission; Kadota; yellow-white figs that are sweet but to this-stemmed they can't hang on the tree long enough to get ripe, and Barea, an Italian white, very sweet and delicious, with a stem that can keep the figs on the tree. Stop. After all, there are 160 cultivars in the world.

And how they have been pampered in the New World, buried in trenches, covered with boards and blankets or hoed and wrapped, still standing up in burlap, rooting paper, insulation, heavy plastic.

These are the moments you see standing in the yards of Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn.

Or Otis Park, Queens, where Edward Saporata has his own favorite: a Greek variety planted 18 years ago by Uncle Leo Bruno on the south side of his neighbor's garage. The building blocks the north wind and absorbs the sun, releasing all that heat into the air as evening falls.

Its pear-shaped fruits are about two inches long. Its

flesh a purplish color. And its taste?

"It's the flavor of being Italian," Mr. Saporata said. Every fall, he cuts her down to about five feet and wraps her in wooden fencing. He fills the circle with leaves and covers the top with a little plastic cupola.

But there are problems: a warm winter's day and she starts to crack; no ventilation, and you get mildew. And then there's the way it looks.

"My wife got after me," he said. "She says anyone you see a wrapped fig, it's the landmark of an Italian."

Which seems odd when you consider that Vicki Saporata was born in Petralia Soprana, a town in Sicily so magnificently high (3,300 feet) that a Roman king named the rock (Petra) after himself (Lia) and made it his citadel. Figs grew fine there, with no wrapping. Maybe that's why plastic seems tacky.

But this is America, so you have to make do.

"I've seen people cover the tree and put a light bulb in there, with a timer on it," Mr. Saporata said. This is how mad people are."

Mr. Saporata admits to wanting to convert his garage to a greenhouse-enc room (pool table and everything), his fig tree at the center, under a skylight. "but then my boys need space for their cars."

Chris DiPaola has the answer: Mr. Saporata.

"I tell all my customers," Mr. DiPaola said. "You will never have to wrap a fig tree if you grow her in a container."

When the winds start to blow, he sets his figs on a dolly and rolls them into his fiberglass shed where they stay all winter, with only a watering or two.

"The temperature in there is only 5 degrees above the

outside temperature," he said. "If it's 10 degrees out here, it's 15 in there, but there's no frost, no wind. On a freakish warm day in January, just open the door. On that first warm day of spring, roll your fig tree outside. When frost threatens, roll her back in. If you don't the figs that have already formed may fall to the ground."

That happened to Pop's tree this year, but she's coming right along now.



"I'll harvest the first crop about a week or two this side of July," Mr. DiPaola said. "And I'll have a second crop starting around the middle of August and running all the way to October."

Mr. DiPaola has many secrets, plenty of holes in the bottom of the barrel, wood chips for drainage, fertilizer every two weeks (pots in full sun need it), plenty of water and limestone, a whole inch on top of the soil.

He spilled some on Pop's trees one day while potting roses, and within three weeks, the leaves turned a vivid, shiny green, and he got even more figs.

And why not? After all, Pop himself once garnered figs on the limestone terraces of Formica.

CARING FOR YOUR FIG TREE

PLEASE READ AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS
CAREFULLY. DO NOT IMPROVISE

Fig trees require a very sunny spot in your garden. South, southwest or western exposure is the best. Your fig tree can be grown in a comfortable container (large pot or whiskey barrel) for many years, it does not have to be planted in the ground. If you have a sunny spot on your patio or deck, that is where you should put your fig tree.

Container figs require a little more care and attention than those planted in the ground. They must be watered twice a day during *hot weather*. They should have at least 1" of lime on the soil and a 1-1/2" holding area for water at the top. When you water, water with a low-pressure as not to disturb the lime on top. Fig trees should be fertilized with MIRACLE-GRO *every 2 weeks* (2) tablespoons per gallon of water.
15-30-15

When the temperature is over 80 degrees, fertilize once a week until the first week in September. The benefits of container growing figs is you do not have to go through the task of wrapping your fig tree with salt-hay or tar paper for the winter so it does not freeze. Figs have hollow branches, and if cold winds crack them, the tree will die back to ground level. If it gets cold enough, the tree can die.

Container or whiskey barrel planting of fig trees is less work in the fall. Before the last frost, remove old drying leaves, tie branches together. If the tree is too tall to stand in your garage or shed, prune back branches to accommodate your tree.

During winter months, while tree is dormant, water lightly once a month. Do not bring tree out until after Mothers Day (around the 15th of May), which is when the last spring frost can occur in our area, (LI). If by chance you bring your tree out and a frost is predicted, just put a large garbage bag over your tree so the frost won't settle on the young tender leaves. When you bring your tree out, it will have small leaves and sometimes, figs.

Also if you want to make things easy for yourself, put caster wheels on your barrel or a base with wheels to move it in or out.

Remember: fig trees require a lot of water and fertilizer. Do Not allow them to dry out or dehydrate!!!

If you plant your fig tree in the ground, make a catch basin with soil around the base of the tree to hold water around the tree.

Winter Storage:

Fig trees should be brought in after Thanksgiving. Store your fig tree in a garage or well constructed storage shed, that is "gable-vented." If there are any windows, cover them to keep sunlight out, (use black plastic) water your tree *once a month* during winter storage. DO NOT put saucers or any kind of catch basin under fig tree containers during winter storage.

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FIG VARIETIES

(a) INDICATES CLASS III COMMON (b) INDICATES CLASS II SAN-PEDRO
(c) INDICATES CLASS IV CAPRI FIG (d) INDICATES CLASS III SMYRNA

1. PETITE NEGRI (a) (DWARF) large purple-black, dark red center (2 crops)
2. CELESTE (a) medium, purple-brown, dark red center, very sweet, sugary
3. ROYAL VINEYARD (a) large coppery-brown, pear-shaped, dark amber center (2 crops)
4. ALMA (a) medium, light yellow-amber, tan flesh, small eye (2 crops)
5. NERO (Italy) (a) large, purple-red (wine color) dark center (2 crops)
6. HARDY CHICAGO (a) medium-large, purple-brown, dark red center (2 crops) (prolific main crop)
7. OSBORNE PROLIFIC (a) medium, green to brown, amber center, sweet, very prolific, hardy (2 crops)
8. BLACK SPANISH (Franciscana) (a) large mahogany-black, red center, very sweet (2 crops)
9. BLACKJACK (a) large, purple-brown, dark red center, juicy (2 crops) (dwarf-tree, tends to spread)
10. GALBUN (a) large, reddish-brown, lite amber center, delicately sweet (2 crops—prolific)
11. BEALL (a) large, reddish-brown, lite amber center (1 crop)
12. MARSEILLES (a) large yellow, clear flesh, very sweet (2 crops) (bears heavy on the 2nd crop)
13. TENA (Spanish) (a) large, yellow, round, clear center. (2 crops—condit-hybrid)
14. HUNTS (a) large, brown, amber center (2 crops)
15. JELLY (a) medium, white, white center, sweet, (2 crops) (Southern regions)
16. ITALIAN PURPLE BEEFERA (a) large, round, purple, sweet, strawberry center (2 crops)
17. ITALIAN PURPLE RED (a) medium, round, dark center (2 crops)
18. SICILIAN RED (a) medium, reddish-brown, dark red center (2 crops)
19. CONADRIA (Genoa) (a) large, purple-black, dark red center, (Greek-Aboukonis) (2 crops)
20. TEXAS EVERBEARING (a) large, dark coppery brown, dark center, (2 crops)
21. CHIOS-A (Greek) (a) large, white, pear shape, with strawberry center (2 crops)
22. CHIOS-B (Greek) (a) medium, reddish-brown, dark red center, sweet (2 crops)
23. CHIOS-C (Greek) (a) large, purple-black, dark red center (Greek-Aboukonis) (2 crops)
24. CORFU (Greek) (a) large, white pear shape, dark strawberry center, (2 crops) (Greek-Speros)
25. CRETE (Greek) (a) large, white, light strawberry center (2 crops/Greek-Kronos)
26. MYKONOS (Greek) (a) large, white, strawberry center (2 crops/Greek-Thina)
27. MYKONOS (Greek) (a) large, pear shape, reddish to purple black, white flesh, strawberry center (Breba Only) (Greek-Perkounis)
28. KALAMATA-A (Greek) (a) medium, black with dark red center, sweet, (2 crops)
29. KALAMATA-B (Greek) (a) large, round, white, dark-pink center (1 crop)
30. SICILIAN BLACK (Verna Grosso) (a) medium, black with dark center (Italian-Agrigenta)
31. SICILIAN BLACK (Sal's Corelone) (Fico di Capo) (Fico-Nera) (a) medium to large, dark red center, (2 crops)
32. ITALY (Pasquale Bianco) (Italian) (a) medium, white, dark strawberry center (1 crop)
33. PASQUALE VERNINO (Italian) (a) medium, black, dark center, (1 crop)
34. WHITE BARESE (Columbro) (a) large white, with strawberry center (2 crops)
35. MALTA BLACK (Grandparent to Celeste) (a) medium, black, dark red center, sweet (2 crops)
36. MONTELLONE (Genoa, Italy) (a) large round, white, lite amber center (2 crops)
37. ISCHIA BLACK (Italy) (a) medium, black with dark center (2 crops)
38. FICO BIANCO (Calabria, Italy) (a) large round, white red center (2 crops)
39. SICILIAN BLACK (Sal's) (Fico Nera) (a) medium large, dark black, red center, very juicy & sweet (2 crops)
40. EASTERN BROWN TURKEY (a) Large, coppery brown, dark amber center (2 crops)
41. ITALIAN EVERBEARING (a) large, purple-brown, dark center (2 crops)
42. FICO BIANCO (Columbo, Italy) (Caserta) (b) large white, white flesh amber center (Breba-Only) (San Pedro)
43. FICO NERA DUEMANTE (Sant-Angelo di Lombardi, Italy) (a) (mountain fig, 2 crops) medium purple black with red center, sweet
44. SICILIAN FICO ROSSO (Taranto, Sicily) (Breba-Crop, San Pedro) (b) large, red fig, white flesh, dark center
45. FICO NERA (Abruzzi, Italy) (Corragio) (a) medium, black fig, white flesh, dark red center (2 crops)
46. LARGE GREEK WHITE (Cyprus) (a) large, pear shape, dark red center (2 crops)
47. DESERT KING (Breba Crop Only—San Pedro) (a) large green with red center
48. LATTARULA (Italian Honey Fig) (a) large, dark amber center, very juicy (w crops)
49. PETER'S HONEY (a) medium, round, yellow-green, ark amber center, very juicy, sweet (2 crops)

50. SICILIAN (Catania) (a) large, pear-shape, green-brown, dark golden amber center (2 crops)
51. NEVARELLA (Oregon) (a) medium brown, amber center (prolific)
52. FICO FIORI BIFARA (Caserta) (a) large, purple-brown, red center, (2 crops)
53. WHITE KADOTA (a) large, yellow-green, amber center (2 crops)
54. BLACK MISSION (a) large, purple-black, strawberry center, sweet, (2 crops)
55. VERTE (Ischia Green) (Italy) (a) large, green, amber center (2 crops)
56. SICILIAN WHITE (Artata Musomelli) (a) large, green-yellow, thick pink to amber center, (2 crops)
57. GENOA (a) large, white, yellow-green strawberry red center (2 crops)
58. NEGRONNE (a) large, purple-black, pearshape, dark red center, very sweet (2 crops)
59. FICO BLANCO (Bifara Musomelli) (Sicily) (b) large, mottled-green-yellow, golden amber center (2 crops)
60. FICO NERA (Siciliano Bifara) (San Pedro) (b) large, black, white flesh, dark-amber center (Breba only)
61. SAN PEDRO (California) (a) large, purple-brown (Turkey), dark red center, (2 crops)
62. EXCEL (a) medium-large, white, dark amber center (2 crops) (Condit hybrid)
63. CONANT (a) medium, brown, amber center, very sweet (2 crops)
64. SICILIAN (Agrigento) (Bifara II) (a) large, round, purple-red, dark center, (2 crops)
65. PALESTINE BLACK ABDULLAH (b) medium, white flesh, amber center
66. FICO BIANCO ATREANO (Durazzano, Italy) (a) large, round, yellow-white, lite pink strawberry center (2 crops)
67. FICO NERA PAESE (Foggia) (Italian) (a) medium, black, dark-red center, (2 crops)
68. LARGE ROUND WHITE (Lombardy) (Northern Mountain Fig) (a) large, white, dark-amber center (2 crops)
69. CRETE GREEK FIG (Knosos Temple Ruins) (Hank) (a)
70. GREEK FIG (Santorini) (Hank) (a)
71. GILLETTE (Edible Capri Fig) (c) medium to large, white, white center, big seeds, solid flavor (2 crops)
72. FICUS PALMATUM (India) (Hank) (c) small, green, edible, (understock used for grafting)
73. BROWN GREEK WHITE (Salonika, San Pedro) (Breba only) (b) large, white, white center
74. RACXIOTKI VAVTO (Greek Macedonia) (San Pedro) (b) large, white, dark-amber center
75. FICO PICCOLO BIANCO (Calabria, Italy) (a) small, white, lite-amber center, (2 crops)
76. CHIOS-D (Greek) (a) large, green-brown, dark golden amber center (2 crops)
77. FICO BIANCO SICILIANO (Sicily) (a) large, white, dark-red center, (2 crops)
78. VASILIKA SIKI (Greek, Athens) (King & Queen) (a) large, white, pear-shape blood-red center (2 crops)
79. ATHENS (Found North of Athens) (a) large, white, round dark red center (2 crops)
80. LARGE GREEK (Kephlonia) (a) large, red, red center
81. CRETE (Greek) (b) large, round, black, white flesh, amber center
82. CRETE (Breba Only) (San Pedro) (b)
83. CRETE GREEK FIG (Hank)
84. ATHENS GREEK FIG (Hank)
85. SICILIAN WHITE (Raffadale, Sicily) (Sal's) (a) large, white, round, white flesh, lite center (2 crops)

MANY NEW VARIETIES NOT LISTED.

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ETHNIC FIGS

In addition to these figs, saved seedlings from figs developed in breeding programs, there are a number of other fig varieties known to the United States. Immigrants often brought cuttings with them and propagated them here. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had a very active importation program in the 1880s; their most noteworthy importation was the nearly 100 varieties in the Chiswick Collection from Great Britain. Many of our best figs derive from it. Details are given in Gustav Eisen's *The Fig: Its History, Culture and Curing*. The USDA imports tapered off after this, but a few varieties continue to dribble in. Recent imports include **Schar Amber** from Israel and **Zidi** from Tunisia. The most recent USDA import I know about is that of **Nazari** from Israel in 1997. There are also rumors about figs smuggled in without USDA permits. I do not condone such activities. Many of those smuggled into the U.S., however, were smuggled in by immigrants decades ago. Some that probably fall in this category are Chicago Hardy and Sal's Figs.

Sal's Fig was introduced into the trade by the DiPaola family who own the Belleclare Nursery, 671 Old Country Road, Plainview, NY 11803 (516) 681-4777 (no mail orders unfortunately). Here is their sales list with comments on origin/ethnicity and descriptions provided by the DiPaolas. I have also included some figs collected from growers of ethnic figs by Paul Tracewski of Tolland, CT:

- Acari Red—Tracewski's collection
- Aboukounis Black (Greek)—Large, purple-black with dark red pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Chios C
- Anton White—Tracewski's collection
- Barese White (Italian)—Large white with strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Columbro
- Chios Red (Greek)—Medium, reddish-brown with dark red pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Chios White (Greek)—Large, white, pear-shaped. Strawberry pulp. Two crops
- Corfu (Greek)—Large, white pear-shaped with dark strawberry pulp. Two crops
- Crete (Greek)—Large, white, light strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Kronos
- Domestic Red-Black—Tracewski's collection
- Fico Bianco (Calabria, Italy)—Large, round with red pulp. Two crops
- Fico Bianco (Columbro, Italy)—Large, white with amber pulp. Breba crop only. (San Pedro type)
- Fico Nera (Abruzzi, Italy)—Medium black fig with dark-red pulp. Two crops. Synonym: Corragio
- Fico Nera Duemane (San Angelo Di Lombardi, Italy)—Medium, purple-black with red-dark pulp. Sweet. Synonym: Mountain Fig
- Fico Rosso (Taranto, Sicily)—Large, red fig with dark-red pulp. Breba crop only (San Pedro type)
- Frank's White—Tracewski's collection
- Italian Everbearing—Large purple-brown with dark-red pulp. Two crops
- Italian Purple Befera—Large, round, purple with strawberry pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Italian Purple Red—Medium, round, purple with strawberry pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Kalamata Black (Greek)—Medium, black with dark-red pulp. Sweet. Two crops
- Kalamata White (Greek)—Large, round, with dark-pink pulp. Main crop only.
- Large Greek White (Cypriot)—Large, pear-shaped with dark-red pulp. Two crops
- Larocca Greek White—Tracewski's collection
- Larocca Sicilian Black—Tracewski's collection
- Malta Black—Medium, black dark-red pulp. Sweet. Two crops. DiPaola says it is a grandparent of Celeste. Very possible since Celeste has only main crop figs
- Mantellone Black (Italian)—Tracewski's collection
- Mykonos Black (Greek)—Large with strawberry pulp. Two crops. Synonym: thina
- Pasquale Bianco (Italian)—Medium white with dark-strawberry pulp. Main crops only
- Pasquale DeVivo's Black (Italian)—Tracewski's collection
- Pasquale Vermino (Italian)—Medium black with dark-red pulp. Main crops only
- Sicilian Black—Medium-large, dark-black with red pulp. Very juicy and sweet. Two crops. Synonyms: Fico Nera, Sal's Fig