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*Edible, medicinal and useful plants  
for a healthier world*

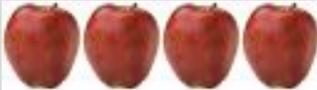
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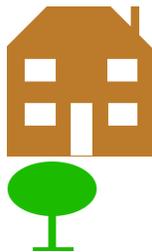
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## **Ficus carica - L.**

### **Fig**

Author	L.	Botanical references	17, 89, 200
Family	<a href="#">Moraceae</a>	Genus	<a href="#">Ficus</a>
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	 The sap and the half-ripe fruits are said to be poisonous[20, 89]. The sap can be a serious eye irritant[238].		
Range	W. Asia. Occasionally found self-sown in Britain, especially in the south-west.		
Habitat	Amongst rocks, in woods and scrub on hot dry soils.		
Edibility Rating	 4 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating  2 (1-5)	

### **Physical Characteristics**



A deciduous Tree growing to 6m by 6m at a medium rate.

It is hardy to zone 7 and is frost tender. It is in flower from June to September, and the seeds ripen from August to September. The flowers are monoecious (individual flowers are either male or female, but both sexes can be found on the same plant)The plant is self-fertile.

The plant prefers light (sandy), medium (loamy) and heavy (clay) soils, requires well-drained soil and can grow in heavy clay and nutritionally poor soils. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It cannot grow in the shade. It requires dry or moist soil and can tolerate drought.

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## Habitats

Woodland Garden; Sunny Edge; South Wall By; West Wall By;

Cultivars: (as above except)

'Brown Turkey'

'White Ischia'

## Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Fruit](#).

Edible Uses: [Curdling agent](#).

Fruit - raw or cooked[1, 3, 3, 4, 46]. Sweet and succulent, a fully ripe specimen is an exquisite fruit that almost literally melts in the mouth [K]. The fruit is often dried for later use[183] and this dried fruit is a major item of commerce. Figs are usually pear-shaped and up to 5cm in diameter[200]. A nutritional analysis is available[218]. The latex from the sap can be used to coagulate plant milks[183].

## Composition

Figures in grams (g) or milligrams (mg) per 100g of food.

### Fruit (Dry weight)

- o 352 Calories per 100g
- o Water: 0%
- o Protein: 6g; Fat: 1.2g; Carbohydrate: 89g; Fibre: 7g; Ash: 3.8g;
- o Minerals - Calcium: 220mg; Phosphorus: 133mg; Iron: 2.7mg; Magnesium: 0mg; Sodium: 9mg; Potassium: 862mg; Zinc: 0mg;
- o Vitamins - A: 347mg; Thiamine (B1): 0.25mg; Riboflavin (B2): 0.25mg; Niacin: 2mg; B6: 0mg; C: 9.22mg;
- o Reference: [218]
- o Notes:

## Medicinal Uses

[Cancer](#); [Demulcent](#); [Digestive](#); [Emollient](#); [Galactagogue](#); [Laxative](#); [Pectoral](#); [Stings](#); [Stomachic](#); [Tonic](#); [Warts](#).

A decoction of the leaves is stomachic[218]. The leaves are also added to boiling water and used as a steam bath for painful or swollen piles[218]. The latex from the stems is used to treat corns, warts and piles[4, 89, 218]. It also has an analgesic effect against insect stings and bites[7]. The fruit is mildly laxative, demulcent, digestive and pectoral[4, 7, 218]. The unripe green fruits are cooked with other foods as a galactagogue and tonic[218]. The roasted fruit is emollient and used as a poultice in the treatment of gumboils, dental abscesses etc[4]. Syrup of figs, made from the fruit, is a well-

known and effective gentle laxative that is also suitable for the young and very old[254, K]. A decoction of the young branches is an excellent pectoral[7]. The plant has anticancer properties[218].

## Other Uses

Wood - pliable but porous and of little value[4, 89]. It is used for hoops, garlands, ornaments etc[89]. When saturated with oil and covered with emery is used as a substitute for a hone[4].

## Cultivation details

Requires a well-drained medium to light loam and some lime rubble incorporated into the soil[1]. Succeeds in dry soils. A heavy wet soil tends to encourage excessive plant growth at the expense of fruit production[1]. Prefers a very sunny position but tolerates part-day shade when grown on a warm wall[202]. Plants are hardy to about -15°C[202]. The top growth is susceptible to frost damage and can be killed back to the base in severe winters, though plants usually recover well[3]. Trees require the protection of a south or west facing wall in most parts of Britain if they are to produce a worthwhile crop [3, 219], though free standing trees can succeed in Cornwall[59]. There is a small orchard of free-standing trees in Anthony garden near Plymouth. These were seen in July 1995 with a very heavy crop of ripening fruits that would have been ready by August[K]. Figs are very widely cultivated in warmer climates than Britain for their edible fruit, there are many named varieties[183]. 'Brown Turkey' is the cultivar most commonly grown in Britain and is probably the most suitable for this climate. 'White Ischia' is a dwarf cultivar (though it can still be 5 metres tall and wide) and is ideal for pot culture[238]. It produces an abundance of green-white thin-skinned fruits[238]. Up to three crops of fruit a year can be obtained in some countries[46]. When grown outdoors in Britain only one crop is usually obtained, though in exceptionally hot years two crops are sometimes produced. The fruit usually takes about 12 months to mature in Britain, baby fruits no larger than about 15mm long in the autumn usually overwinter to form the following years crop of fruit. If plants are grown in pots in a conservatory or cold greenhouse, two crops of fruit can be obtained, one in early summer and one in late summer to autumn[260]. Pinch back the new shoots to about six leaves in order to encourage the second crop[260]. It is a good idea to restrict the roots of fig trees on most soil types in order to discourage excessive vegetative growth at the expense of fruit production[3]. This can be done by root pruning, but it is easier to place some kind of permanent restriction around the roots - planting into a large tub that is then buried into the ground is one method. It is important to make sure that the tree still gets ample moisture, especially when the fruits are ripening.

## Propagation

Seed - sow spring in a warm greenhouse. Prick out the seedlings as

soon as they are large enough to handle and overwinter the young plants in a greenhouse for at least their first year. Plant out in late spring after the last expected frosts and give some protection for their first winter outdoors. Cuttings of mature wood 10 - 12cm with a heel, winter in a frame. Fairly easy, but the cuttings must be kept frost free. It is probably best if the cuttings are put in individual pots [78]. Layering.

## Cultivars

### 'Brown Turkey'

A medium-size fruit with a thin tough skin[183]. The flavour is rich and the quality good, it is best eaten fresh and is not good for drying or canning[183]. This cultivar withstands the cold better than most other forms[183] and is perhaps the most suitable form for growing in Britain.

### 'White Ischia'

A dwarf cultivar (though it can still be 5 metres tall and wide), it is ideal for pot culture[238]. It produces an abundance of green-white thin-skinned fruits[238]. The flesh is red and very sweet with a rich flavour, it ripens early[183].

### 'White'

## Links

This plant is also mentioned in the following PFAF articles:  
[Conservatory Plants](#).

## References

### [K] Ken Fern

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[1] **F. Chittendon.** *RHS Dictionary of Plants plus Supplement.* 1956 Oxford University Press 1951

Comprehensive listing of species and how to grow them. Somewhat outdated, it has been replaced in 1992 by a new dictionary (see [200]).

[3] **Simmons. A. E.** *Growing Unusual Fruit.* David and Charles 1972 ISBN 0-7153-5531-7

A very readable book with information on about 100 species that can be grown in Britain (some in greenhouses) and details on how to grow and use them.

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal.* Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9 Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[7] **Chiej. R.** *Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Plants.* MacDonald 1984

ISBN 0-356-10541-5

Covers plants growing in Europe. Also gives other interesting information on the plants. Good photographs.

[17] **Clapham, Tootin and Warburg.** *Flora of the British Isles.* Cambridge University Press 1962

A very comprehensive flora, the standard reference book but it has no pictures.

[20] **Riotte. L.** *Companion Planting for Successful Gardening.* Garden Way, Vermont, USA. 1978 ISBN 0-88266-064-0

Fairly good.

[46] **Uphof. J. C. Th.** *Dictionary of Economic Plants.* Weinheim 1959

An excellent and very comprehensive guide but it only gives very short descriptions of the uses without any details of how to utilize the plants. Not for the casual reader.

[59] **Thurston.** *Trees and Shrubs in Cornwall.* 0

Trees and shrubs that succeed in Cornwall based on the authors own observations. Good but rather dated.

[78] **Sheat. W. G.** *Propagation of Trees, Shrubs and Conifers.* MacMillan and Co 1948

A bit dated but a good book on propagation techniques with specific details for a wide range of plants.

[89] **Polunin. O. and Huxley. A.** *Flowers of the Mediterranean.* Hogarth Press 1987 ISBN 0-7012-0784-1

A very readable pocket flora that is well illustrated. Gives some information on plant uses.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants.* Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9

Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening.* 1992. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5

Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[202] **Davis. B.** *Climbers and Wall Shrubs.* Viking. 1990 ISBN 0-670-82929-3

Contains information on 2,000 species and cultivars, giving details of cultivation requirements. The text is terse but informative.

[218] **Duke. J. A. and Ayensu. E. S.** *Medicinal Plants of China* Reference Publications, Inc. 1985 ISBN 0-917256-20-4

Details of over 1,200 medicinal plants of China and brief details of their uses. Often includes an analysis, or at least a list of constituents. Heavy going if you are not into the subject.

[219] **Grey-Wilson. C. & Matthews. V.** *Gardening on Walls* Collins 1983 ISBN 0-00-219220-0

A nice little book about plants for growing against walls and a small section on plants that can grow in walls.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses.* Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

[260] **Phillips. R. & Rix. M.** *Conservatory and Indoor Plants Volumes 1 & 2* Pan Books, London. 1998 ISBN 0-330-37376-5

Excellent photos of over 1,100 species and cultivars with habits and cultivation details plus a few plant uses. Many species are too tender for outdoors in Britain though there are many that can be grown outside.

## Readers Comments

### Plant Rennet

**Rich** Sat Apr 15 16:59:27 2000

According to [VegSoc](#), in the past, fig leaves, melon, wild thistle and safflower have all supplied plant rennets for cheese making.

[agsieve](#) also has information about another plant source, using the juice from the plant as a coagulant.

### Ficus carica

**T.H. Culhane** Tue Jun 06 22:32:52 2000

Hi, I'm fascinated by your website as it provides me useful information for my doctoral dissertation on reviving neo-traditional agroforestry resources of the Maya people.

I have been working with the edible leaves, fruit and seeds and sap of *Brosimum alicastrum*, the Maya breadnut tree (Moraceae) and was intrigued to note that the leaves look extremely similar to those of the ornamental ficus tree (*Ficus benjamina*). Recently I traveled to the Kew Gardens and was discussing with one of the curators the issue of edible leaves in the Moraceae while munching on some of the leaves from their single specimen of *Brosimum* (found in the Palmhouse in the Central American section).

Since I have been eating fresh and prepared Brosimum leaves for the past year in Guatemala whilst working with the Maya indigenous groups I have become curious whether Ficus benjamina leaves might not be another edible but underutilized resource. This morning, after searching for contraindications, I tested a single small ficus leaf and so far have experienced no ill effects. But before continuing with this experiment, I would like to know if you have ever heard of any indication that Ficus benjamina leaves might be toxic.

Thanks for your help.

T.H. Culhane TheRainforest.com

## Ficus carica

**T.H. Culhane** Tue Jun 13 20:06:41 2000

Since writing I've learned the same about the sap of Ficus benjamina (dermatitis causing). Since there is sap at the base of the leaves, I'm staying clear from it for now.

## Ficus carica

**k.zannettou** Mon Aug 18 05:36:48 2003

k.zannettou Cyprus 19.8.2003 i am dealing with herbs as i have written two books about herbs in Cyprus for more than 670 herbs. about Ficus carica i have to say that a strong decoction of the leaves can help as an expectoral and especially for asthma.

## Ficus carica

**Marc, Cologne, Germany, z7** Wed Feb 11 14:52:49 2004

In Germany there is a very hardy cultivar available called "Violetta" or "Bayernfeige" (Bavarian Fig). It is said to be reliably hardy to at least about -20°C!

## Ficus carica

**Lesley Eggleton** Tue May 18 17:51:40 2004

Hello, Just to say your website is great and has been very helpful to me. We have just moved and was looking for info on planting etc many thanks

## Ficus carica

**debby busby** Sun Aug 22 22:48:04 2004

my church has one of these trees inside. We are trying to find out how we can take trimmings from it and root the trimmings? Can someone let me know how

## Ficus carica

**vinod vinuviswan@gmail.com** Tue Apr 4 2006

can u send the pic of ficus carica - technical details i need it badly

## Ficus carica

**salman shalchian tabrizi** Sun Apr 23 2006

I love this plant using it was like a dream come true for my illness please send me whatever you have in relation with it's medical usage thanks alot

## Ficus carica

**Babar Ali** Wed Jul 26 2006

i want work on this plant of its anticancer activity.please send me whatever you have in relation with its anticancer activity ,evaluation, standerdisation,hplc,hptlc method and other information.iwill be highly obliged to you.thank you very much.

## Ficus carica

**una** Sat Aug 5 2006

I am very interested in expectorant and antiastmatic use of decoction of leaves of ficus carica and I would like to know everything about contents of that decoctum and about its toxic activity. thank you very much

## Ficus carica

**gina** Mon Mar 26 2007

hi- jethro kloss in back to eden says the maerican indians used an infusion of fig leaves as a specific for anything bronchial. stuck up in the mountains one time i used it as such (5-6 cups daily) and found that it decreases the desire for tobacco incredibly. kloss also recommends it in an ointment and i have used it to great effect in the treatment of cracked heels, burns scars and eczema (dried herb infused in soy oil, wax). it is also very effective for chronic costipation and irritable bowel syndrome (2 cups before retiring). i would best categorize it as a systemic lubricant. it does exactly the opposite as

salvia officinalis which is good for wet coughs and edema, however i have a theory that they may work well together. have to wait for warmer weather to gather the leaves, though.

## Ficus carica

**Ferit** Mon Sep 24 2007

I am very interesting on Ficus carica's DNA structure and new fig variety breeding. If you would send me whatever publications on fig's DNA and genetics, I would be very happy.

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