

HANDLING FIG TREES IN THE NURSERY

Figs are a sub-tropical fruit and the trees must be protected from frost and drying winds. For success with fig trees, they should be cut back about 1/3, and healed in raised beds of moist sand. The following is an outline for canning and care we would recommend. It seems to be working well with many customers.

1. When holding bareroot trees, store in coarse sand only. Use cement sand or coarser. **Do not** use fine plaster sand. Do not store in organic matter. Be sure the storage area drains well and the trees are not in standing water.
2. When canning, use by volume 1/3 coarse sand, 1/3 sandy loam soil and 1/3 organic. The organic components should be pine or fir wood, peat moss or rice hulls. **Do not** use redwood, cedar wood or barks such as pine or fir. Avoid any organic that turns black.
3. When canning, water in within 2 hours of canning. 48 hours later re-water to eliminate air pockets and to be sure all the organic is wet. **Do not** water again until in leaf. No need to water in January, February, March or April if not in leaf.
4. Start watering when trees leaf out. Do not over water. The canning mix will hold an adequate amount of water. Trees will use more water after good growth and more leaves.

Even with hot, dry winds from the desert areas, nurserymen are surprised on how well the containers will stay moist on the bottom. Do not worry if the top of the soil dries. When not in leaf, you want limited moisture only. This will help the new roots to develop quickly.

Protect your figs. They are tender and delicate until they establish themselves later in the spring. It is important to keep the dormant figs in a moist, humid environment until leafed out. One means would be to keep them in a warm & humid greenhouse. Another would be to "Sweat" them. Sweating is the process in which one covers the bareroot trees in damp sand or soil for a period of time (but don't forget them!). However, in either case the plants should be kept moist. Hot, or cold dry winds can kill them quickly. If the trees must be outside during dry winds or freezing temperature please mist them a few times a day.

Fig trees exude a milky sap when tapped with the blade of a knife. By this means it is easy to determine the viability of a given tree. If you tap the top of the tree and no milky sap shows - don't be alarmed, tip dieback is normal in figs. Go down a few inches and tap again. It should "milk" at this point.

Fig trees add to the landscape with their dense canopy of large lobed, dark green leaves in the summer, and thick, gray trunk, and graceful branches in the winter. Plump, ripe figs picked from one's own garden is a special delight. Figs can be canned and dried as well. Select the varieties best suited for your area. Most varieties produce two crops, one in the early summer and again in August-October. figs grow in the sun belt areas of the United States. Varieties can be selected for mild coastal plantings or hot, dry areas like the interior valleys of California.

Figs can be planted in January and February as bareroot trees or can be planted year round from containers. Except for special handling outlined above, fig trees are planted the same as other trees.