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SUMNER

FIG CULTURE

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Fig Culture

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Fig Culture Edible Figs: Their Culture and Curing. Fig Culture in the United States.:

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**Fig Culture Edible Figs: Their
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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U. S. Department of Agriculture,

Division of Pomology,

Washington, D. C., January 30, 1897.

Sir: I have the honor to transmit herewith, and to recommend for publication as a bulletin of this division, articles on "Edible figs: their culture and curing," by Dr. Gustav Eisen, of San Francisco, Cal., and "Fig culture in the Gulf States," by Frank S. Earle, of Auburn, Ala.

The climatic conditions of the sections of the United States in which figs can be successfully grown are so widely different that it has been deemed advisable to publish these papers as one bulletin, in order that a comprehensive presentation of the subject may be within reach of those interested in this industry.

S. B. Heiges, Pomologist.

Hon. J. Sterling Morton,
Secretary of Agriculture.

EDIBLE FIGS: THEIR CULTURE AND CURING.

By Gustav Eisen

The edible figs cultivated in the United States both for eating fresh and for drying all belong to one species, *Ficus carica*. Of this species there are now described about 400 varieties which are sufficiently distinct to be considered by the student and the practical horticulturist. The intending planter should study the character of the varieties more closely than has hitherto been customary in this country, though his safest plan is, of course, to plant in quantity only such varieties as have proved valuable in his own locality, or where soil and climate are similar.

NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE FLOWERS AND FRUIT OF THE FIG

Before we consider these different varieties, a few remarks on the nature and structure of the fruit are necessary. The fig which we eat is really a receptacle, on the surface of which are situated the numerous flowers. But as this surface is concave, or curved inwardly, like the hollow of a closed hand, the flowers can not be seen except when the fig is cut. Then it becomes apparent that the chamber formed by the curved receptacle communicates with the outside by means of the “eye” at its apex. In some varieties the “eye” is almost closed, opening only when the fig has reached a certain age; in others it is so large that a pea could easily pass through. The flowers are always more or less fleshy, are generally imperfect, and do not much resemble the bright flowers of other fruit trees and plants in our gardens. There are four distinct kinds of fig flowers, but these are not always found in a single fig, in fact they are rarely all found together. They are designated as follows:

Male flowers.— These possess four pollen-producing stamens. They are found only in the wild or “caprifig,” the ancestor of our cultivated figs, and in a very few varieties of edible figs.

Female flowers.— These possess a single style, stigma, and ovary, and when fertilized, produce seeds. Owing to the absence of male flowers, or the failure of the male and female flowers

in the same fig to mature at the same time, they rarely produce fertile seeds unless fertilized by pollen carried by insects.

Gall flowers.— These are degenerate female flowers which do not produce seeds, the abortive ovary serving only for the habitation and breeding place of a very small wasp, the *Blastophaga*, which is used in caprification. The gall flowers are found only in the original wild fig.

Mule flowers.— These are imperfect female flowers, incapable of producing seeds or of affording a breeding place for the wasp. These flowers are found to the exclusion of all others in most of our cultivated figs.

Because of these differences in the flowers the numerous varieties of edible figs may be divided into tribes or subspecies. These are as follows:

CLASSIFICATION OF VARIETIES OF EDIBLE FIGS

Caprifigs (goat figs or wild figs). – These figs grow wild in southern Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia, and have been recently introduced into California. They bear all the kinds of flowers except the *mule* flowers, and as they are the only figs bearing *male* flowers they are essential in all fig districts where mature and fertile seeds are of importance, or in other words, where caprification is necessary.

Smyrna figs. – These are grown only in the Smyrna district of Asia Minor. They have only female flowers, and neither these latter nor the receptacle on which they grow will come to any maturity without caprification or pollination. So-called Smyrna figs, which have been bought of nurserymen, have generally proved spurious, as, unlike the true Smyrna figs, they mature their fruit without pollination. Of late years true Smyrna figs have been planted in California, but they have failed to ripen fruit except when artificially pollinated. These will not produce ripe fruit in commercial quantities until caprification can be practiced, and neither these nor the caprifig should be planted at the present time, except for experimental purposes.

Common edible figs. – These are the common varieties of our orchards, which bear fruit and mature it with regularity without pollination or caprification. They bear two crops a year, the

“early figs” or “brebas,” and the later or “summer figs.” Of this tribe alone there are some 400 varieties described more or less perfectly, and probably as many more undescribed and unknown.

San Pedro figs.— This tribe contains only a few dozen varieties, some of which are cultivated in California, and also in Florida and other Southern States. They are characterized by maturing only the first crop or “brebas.” The second crop always drops before reaching maturity. The cause of this is that the first crop contains only “mule flowers,” like those of the common figs, while the second contains only “female flowers,” like those of the Smyrna figs.

The San Pedro tribe of fig varieties is specially valuable on account of the large size and early maturity of the “brebas” or first crop. They should, therefore, be planted only in places where it is desirable to grow large, early figs, for marketing fresh. They do not succeed everywhere, as they require a warm and early spring climate.

In tropical countries there are numerous varieties of other species of figs growing wild. Many of them are edible, but all are less palatable than our edible fig, and with the exception of the Sycomore fig, *Ficus sycomorus*, of Africa, are of no economic importance except as food for animals.

For this purpose, however, they are very useful, and the Sycomore fig should be introduced into the Southern States, where it would probably thrive in frost-free localities.

VARIETIES OF FIGS FOUND USEFUL IN CALIFORNIA

The existing confusion regarding the names of the varieties of the fig is largely due to incomplete descriptions. The following points are of importance in every fig description, and should always be noted: Size, form, neck, stalk, ribs, eye, color of skin, color of pulp, seeds, quality, growth, and leaf. In order to simplify descriptions, these points should always be mentioned in the same order. It is also of great importance to note whether the first crop alone matures fruit, and whether the two crops differ materially in any of the above-mentioned points.

Of the 400 or more described varieties of figs, comparatively few have been tested in the United States. Most of those tested are French or hot-house varieties, very few southern or Mediterranean figs having been introduced, though many of the latter are worthy of testing in this country.

A few of the varieties that have been found most useful in California are described:

Adriatic. – Size medium, roundish; neck medium, stalk short; ribs obscure; eye open, with red iris; skin very thin, greenish in the shade, yellowish in the sun; pulp bright strawberry red or with violet streaks in the meat; varies in quality according to location.

This has been found very useful in California, but is not of fine flavor when dried. It requires rich soil, with considerable

moisture and a very large percentage of lime. This variety is *not* identical with that known in Italy as Adriatic.

Angelique (syn. *Angelica*). – Medium, pyriform; ribs prominent, yellowish white; pulp white with rose-colored center; leaves five-lobed. A very good variety in some of the coast valleys.

Athenes (syn. *Marseillaise*). – Small, roundish or turbinate, with indistinct ribs, depressed at apex, skin rough; color whitish yellow, pulp red, opaline; very sweet and one of the best drying figs both in France and California.

Bourjassotte, Black (syn. *Barnissotte, Black*). – Medium, broader than long, flattened at apex, with no neck and an uneven cheek; ribs distinct, even; eye small, sunk, closed; skin waxy, black with violet blush; bloom clear blue, wanting at apex; meat pink, pulp blood-red. A most excellent fig for table. It requires rich, moist soil.

Bourjassotte, White (syn. *Barnissotte, White*). – A fig related to the former, but larger; eye large, sunk; skin waxy, green; pulp bright red. A very fine fig. Tree very large.

Brown Turkey. – Large, turbinate, pyriform, with hardly distinct neck; stalk short; apex flattened; ribs few, slightly elevated; eye medium, slightly open, scales large; skin smooth, greenish to violet-brown in sun, with darker ribs; pulp dark, rosy red, quality good, and tree a good bearer. Brunswick is frequently confounded with this fig.

Brunswick. – Very large, pyriform, with swollen cheeks, one

of which is larger than the other; apex very obtuse; neck and stalk very short; ribs distinct, but not much elevated; eye medium, open; skin pale amber with violet tint; pulp amber. An early, large fig, but with no flavor. Very common; requires rich, moist soil.

Celeste, Blue (syn. *Violette*). – Small, ovate, turbinate; ribs few, but distinct, especially near apex; eye raised, rough; color dark, violet amber, without reddish blush; bloom confined to the neck; skin thin; pulp deep rose; meat amber; sweet, but lacking in flavor.

Dottato. – Medium ovate, pyriform; neck well set; stalk very short or none; ribs low; skin smooth; eye medium; skin thin, yellowish green; meat white; pulp yellowish amber, sometimes with violet flush. One of the best figs for drying; tree a strong grower, requiring moist, rich soil. Lately introduced into California.

Drap d'Or. – Large, pyriform, with very low neck and stalk; ribs elevated; apex obtuse and concave; color light, violet, reddish amber, not dark; pulp rosy red. A fig of very fine quality, especially useful for confections and crystallizing; not identical with Brunswick.

Du Roi. – Above medium; round, pyriform; stalk very short; eye large or variable, with scales standing out; skin smooth, pale bluish green; pulp amber, with rosy streaks and exceedingly minute seeds. Related to Marseillaise and Athenes, and one of the very best figs in California for drying.

Early Violet. – Small to very small, round, turbinate; neck

distinct but short; stalk medium to long; ribs distinct, elevated, skin rough; violet-brown, with thin, pearl-colored bloom; pulp red. This variety bears almost continuously and is preferable to the Ischias and Celeste.

Genoa, White. – Above medium, pyriform; neck small; stalk short; ribs indistinct; skin downy; eye very small; skin pale olive-green; pulp pale rose. One of the better figs, quite distinct from Marseillaise.

Gentile. – Very large; ovate pyriform; neck short but distinct; stalk very short; skin uneven, with ridges; eye very large, open, with projecting scales; color greenish yellow spotted with white; pulp amber, streaked with rose; seeds few but very large. Only the first crop of this variety ripens. It is of the San Pedro tribe. One of the best early figs.

Grosse Grise Bifère. – Medium, ovate pyriform; neck very short, stalk short; ribs distinct; eye small; skin downy, dark violet amber, pale olive in shade; the bloom is separated by a distinct line from the apex; pulp deep red. A tender, good fig.

Ischia, black. – Small; neck short; stalk medium; skin smooth; color dark, violet black, greenish around the apex; neck dark; eye medium, open; bloom thin, dark blue; pulp red. Of fair quality but small size.

Ischia, White. – Size below medium, round, with small neck; stalk very short; eye open; skin smooth, bluish green with brown flush; pulp rosy red. Common in California, but hardly worthy of cultivation in that State.

Magdalen. – Below medium; round; ribs distinct, rough, disappearing around the eye; stalk longer than the fig; eye open, large; skin greenish yellow; pulp amber white. A very delicious fig, superior to the Ischias and Celeste; not synonymous with Angelique.

Marseillaise, Long. – Large, longer than wide; skin thick with brownish shade; pulp dull red. Requires moist soils. A fair fig which dries well; not related to either Black or White Marseillaise.

Marseillaise, White. – Medium ovate, pyriform; neck short; stalk medium; ribs numerous and distinct; apex flattened; eye large, open; skin downy, pale yellowish green, mottled with white; pulp amber, with a few large seeds. One of the best figs for drying. Requires sandy, rich soil.

Mission, Black. – Medium to large, turbinate; neck long; stalk short; ribs distinct; eye prominent, open; skin rough, deep mahogany violet, with a red flush; pulp not fine, red, but not bright or brownish amber; sweet but not high-flavored; common in the Southern States, California, and Mexico. The oldest fig in this country.

Monaco Bianco (syn. *White Monaco*). – Large, rounded, turbinate, flattened; neck small but very distinct; ribs numerous; eye very open; skin dark, bluish green with thin bloom; pulp dark-red rose; a most excellent fig for table; one of the best in California.

Pastilière. – Large, 3 inches by 1½; elongated, pyriform with

long neck; stalk short; eye closed, surrounded by an elevated iris; skin rough, hairy, with blue bloom; pulp red. Fine for preserves.

Ronde Noire. – Large, round, but irregular; neck distinct, short; eye small; skin smooth, waxy, dark violet brown; pulp amber. Greatly to be recommended as a table fig. It is not related to Black Ischia or Osborn Prolific.

San Pedro, Black. – Very large, elongated ovate, with no stalk, but with well set neck; skin smooth, violet black with green neck; pulp red, coppery, tinted violet. For table use. The largest fig known. It is not related to the following variety:

San Pedro, White (syn. *Brebas*). – Very large, round, flattened at apex; stalk and neck short; eye open; skin thick, tender, of a bright yellow color or greenish in the shade, without bloom; pulp amber. A remarkable and handsome fig. Only the first crop matures without caprification. Suited only for table use. Requires moist, rich soil.

Verdal, Round. – Below medium, round pyriform, without stalk or neck; skin smooth, waxy, bluish green; eye closed; pulp dark, blood red. A small fig, but valuable for canning and preserves; better than the Ischias or Celeste. It does well in the Santa Clara Valley, but is inferior in the interior of the State.

CAPRIFICATION

This process must be practiced wherever the Smyrna figs are grown, for without it they will not mature either seeds or figs. The flowers of the Smyrna figs are all pistillate and require pollination, which in the case of these varieties can be effected on a large scale only through caprification. The process consists in the suspension of wild caprifigs, which possess staminate and gall flowers, in the Smyrna fig trees, when the pistils in the blossoms of the latter are in a receptive condition. A minute wasp, the *Blastophaga*, breeds in the caprifig in large numbers, and on leaving it crawls into the Smyrna fig, covered with the pollen of the caprifig. This pollen, transferred by contact from the body of the wasp to the receptive stigmas of the flowers in the Smyrna figs, effects the fertilization of the ovules of those flowers and causes them to form seeds and mature the fruit of which they are a part. These seeds impart a nutty aroma and flavor to the fig when dried, and give it a marked superiority to our common figs. Caprification is not yet practiced in the United States, the wasp not existing here, though both it and some of the Smyrna figs have been brought to this country several times. The first importation of Smyrna fig trees was made by Gulian P. Rixford, about 1880, when three varieties of Smyrna figs and a single caprifig tree were introduced.

CLIMATE SUITABLE FOR FIG CULTURE

A native of a semitropical climate, the fig requires a similar climate to attain perfection. Many horticultural varieties, however, have originated in temperate regions, and these can be grown with profit in a climate much colder than that of the habitat of the wild fig. Figs, in fact, may be grown in all regions where peaches and apricots succeed without protection, and if given winter protection they can be profitably grown in such regions near large cities which furnish a market for the fresh fruit at profitable prices.

In considering the suitability of the climate of a region for fig culture, the purpose for which the figs are to be grown must be first determined.

Figs may be grown for drying, for canning and preserving, for sale in the fresh state, or for general home consumption. As the conditions and treatment necessary to produce fruit suited to these different uses vary considerably, each subject will be discussed separately.

FIGS FOR DRYING

The best dried figs are produced in warm countries, such as the Mediterranean region of Europe, Asia Minor, Upper and Lower California, but especially in Asia Minor, in the valleys near Smyrna. The conditions of climate there are as follows: The days are moderately warm, the temperature seldom exceeding 90° F. These conditions prevail during the summer, while the figs are growing and ripening. The winter is seldom frosty. The winter climate, however, is of less importance, provided it is not cold enough to injure the young figs or the tips of the branches. Such frosts will not injure the second crop, which is used for drying, but it is a great drawback to the wild fig and to the fig insects, which are necessary to the maturing of the fruit of certain varieties of drying figs. The summer climate is almost rainless, while in winter there are abundant rains. The air in summer is not a dry, desert air, however, but carries considerable moisture. The moisture of the air is an important point, as in a very dry air the figs do not develop high flavor, but are “flat” in taste. During the drying season there should be little or no rain.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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