

Good example of the spread of the fig research paper

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Ficus carica L, popularly known as the fig, is a tree that has been known to the world for centuries. Its roots are traced to the Western Asia but it has spread throughout various parts of the globe including Europe and the Americas. The fruit of the fig, or more accurately its flowers, are eaten fresh, dried, or pickled. It has served as a delicious treat to both the elite and the masses. In the succeeding sections, the spread of the fig is discussed focusing on its origin, cultivation, and current market.

Description of the Fig

The fig tree, scientifically referred to as *Ficus carica* L, is a small tree with spreading branches. According to Morton (1997), the trunk does not grow bigger than 17.5 centimeters in diameter and its height is between 3-9 meters only. It bears fruits that are pear-shaped, turbinate, or obovoid. The skin of the fruit is tender and thin and the color varies from yellow, pink, and red. When the fig fruit is ripe, it is sweet and juicy, otherwise it is gummy and latex. Actually, the part commonly referred to as the "fruit" is a syconium or a group of flowers. Aside from the common fig which bear all female flowers and does not require pollination, there are three other types: caprifig, Smyrna fig, and San Pedro fig. All three require pollination to bear fruits.

Origin of the Fig

The fig is considered an indigenous plant of Western Asia (Morton 2007), particularly in Arabia (Herman 2011). It has spread throughout the Mediterranean due to human distribution. According to Armstrong (1996) the fig is a native species of the native region Caria, which is located between

the Black Seas and the Mediterranean. Neolithic site excavations, which dated as far back as 5, 000 years B. C. contain remnants of figs and this indicated the fig tree's existence for centuries. Archaeologists have found " carbonized fig fruits as well as 313 single drupelets, dated between 11, 400 and 11, 200 year BP, at the early Pre-Pottery Neolithic A Gilgal village site in the Lower Jordan Valley" (Kislev, Hartman, & Bar-Yosef, 2006, p. 1373). In the 16th century, the fig reached Europe, the Americas, Africa, Australia, and other parts of Asia. It was already growing in China in 1550, it reached England between 1525 and 1548, and the countries of Japan, India, South Africa, and Australia were growing the European types (Morton, 1987).

Cultivation of the Fig

The spread of the fig trees resulted from human distribution as well as the trees' capacity to easily grow from cuttings. However, to bear fruit, *Ficus carica* requires caprification. This is a pollination process that requires the presence of fig wasps (Armstrong, 1996). The tiny wasp known as *Blastophaga grossorum* enters the syconium and aids the pollination of caprifig, a type that has male and female flowers. Cross pollination by caprifigs is required by the Smyrna and San Pedro types, although the latter needs it on its subsequent crops as in its initial crop it only has female flowers like the common fig and does not require pollination. Commercial cultivation of figs in the US began in the 1900s when the wasp was brought to the country. The figs produces three crops in a year, one in the early summer (June-July); another in midsummer-autumn (August-November); and the last one in early spring or in March (Kislev, Hartman, & Bar-Yosef, 2006).

The fig trees reached Mexico in the 16th century. In the US, the climate in California suited its cultivation which began in 1769, although fig trees began to be planted in Virginia a century earlier. The succeeding years resulted in the spread of fig culture to other states such as Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Texas. In Central and South America, fig trees were also cultivated and seen in plantations, although most of these places only grew the common fig. The ones in Chile and Argentina were the varieties that matched cooler regions (Morton, 1987). Commercial production of figs was encouraged in 1960 in Venezuela because it was in high demand. In Columbia, the fresh fruits of the fig trees were considered luxury items and these were being sold for \$6.35 to \$7.25 per lb in the year 1976 (Morton, 1987).

Producers of the Fig

Growing fig tree in the US became a form of hobby, especially in the Northeast and Midwest which have very cold winters. They would have to take extreme wintering measures to protect plants which are of sub-tropical origins. According to Herman (2011), the cultivation of figs in areas that are less temperate became a privileged occupation, only for those with the “means, labor, political inclination, and polite scientific knowledge to devote to the nurture of delicate plants under glass (n. p.)” However, in the Southern part of the US, growing figs cuts across class status. Herman (2011) relates that figs bring childhood memories about life in the plantations before the war in Southern US.

Inputs to produce the Fig

There are at least two requirements to cultivate fig trees and harvest fruits. The first is to have cuttings in order to grow the trees and the second one is to bring along the tiny wasps. The fig cultivars should have at least five characteristics. According to Andersen and Crocker (2009), the cultivars should have (a) cold hardiness; (b) the ability to set fruit without pollination; (c) fruit having a closed eye or ostiole; (d) a long peduncle that allows the fruit to droop and shed moisture; and (e) a green skin on fruit to minimize bird herbivory (p. 3-4). Earlier it has been mentioned that it took several centuries before the US was able to commercially cultivate the figs in the US, and in order to do so they had to import *Blastophaga grossorum* to produce fruits. In areas where winters are extreme it is also necessary to provide insulation to fig trees.

Consumers of the Fig

In the olden times, the fruits of the fig tree were eaten by travelers who go on long journeys across the deserts (Armstrong 1996). When the figs reached other parts of the globe, such as the Americas, these became foods of luxury accessible only by the elite. However, there were accounts that in the Southern US, fig products became “common to the kitchen yards of rich and poor, black and white. In the summer its bounty provided pleasure for all. Preserved, it evoked the taste of sun and warmth in the dark chill of winter. No longer the cultural privilege of the eighteenth-century landed elites, the fig at the close of the nineteenth century was truly an emblem of hope and plenty in the common landscape” [Herman, 2011, n. p.].

Marketing of the Fig

The fig's nutritional value as well as its delicious taste is known worldwide. Fig products are marketed by companies all over the world. Examples of these are the Soofer Co. Inc. based in Los Angeles, California and the Essential Ingredient Inc. which is located in Sydney, Australia. Both were established in the 1980s. Both companies distribute fig products in their respective markets. Soofer Co. Inc. advertises the Sadaf dried figs in its website and a 6-oz imported dried fig costs \$5.99 (Soofer, nd). Meanwhile, the website of Essential Ingredient Inc. devotes an entire page highlighting the sweet taste of figs from trees "grown on the small hills of Calabria, Italy, the taste of the deliciously sweet and juicy fruit" (Essential, 2011). The company imports fig products from the Dolci Pensieri Di Calabria of Italy and distribute their products, such as Fig Ball and the Fig Panetto into Australia. Aside from websites, fig products are also promoted through books and online magazines. Roehl (1996) published a book about whole foods which included the fig. Here, she wrote about the origins of the fig, its nutritional value, and tips on how to buy, store, and use it in home cooking. The online magazine of the BBC features fig recipes, examples of which are duck with honey and fig and stuffed pork medallions with figs and sage (BBC, 2013). Similar to the book earlier mentioned, the page on figs also described the fruits origins, methods of storing, and various ways of preparations using the ingredient. The way the fig products are advertised suggest that the intended audience are mostly women, especially mothers, or those individuals who very particular about health choices. The consumers must

also be capable of shelling out an extra amount for the imported ones that would cost more.

Changes in the perception of the Fig

In ancient times, figs were basic foods, consumed for their nutritional value and functioned as important companions through long journeys across deserts. It was also “considered sacred in some cultures, with some fig trees revered by Christians, Jews and Moslems of the Middle East” (Armstrong 1986). The usual preparation of the fruit was either fresh or dried. When the fig reached other shores, it became a luxury product accessible to those , grown and consumed by people who have the means and money. In the past, the fig was also considered an important medicinal ingredient for laxatives (Herman, 2011). At present, the fig is promoted for both its nutrition and status.

The spread of the fig illustrates how globalization works. The tree that was grown in Western Asia was brought to Europe, Americas, Australia, Africa, and other parts of Asia and along with it are the methods of cultivation and consumption of its products. The fruit of the fig has also become accessible to more people and information about its preparation are easily accessible, through books and online magazines. There are also many different sources to choose from. A consumer can select from which country the fig was grown and from what company that distributes it. Globalization has resulted in the availability of information from many different sources that enables a consumer to make an informed decision.

References

- Andersen, P. C. & Crocker, T. E. (2009). The Fig. Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/MG/MG21400.pdf>
- Armstrong, W. P. (1996). Ancient Figs of the Holy Land. Waynes Word. Retrieved from
- BBC. (2013). “ Fig recipes”. FOOD Ingredients. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/fig>.
- Essential (2011, Nov 14). “ Dolci Pensieri Di Calabria- the sweet figs of Calabria.” Retrieved from <http://www.essentialingredient.com.au/ingredients/dolci-pensieri-di-calabria-the-sweet-figs-of-calabria/>
- Herman, B. L. (2011). American food in the age of experiment: Farming, cooking, and eating by the book. Common Place, 11 (3). Retrieved from <http://www.common-place.org/vol-11/no-03/bherman/>.
- Morton, J. (1987). Fig. Fruits of Warm Climates. Retrieved from <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/fig.html>.
- Kislev, M. E., Hartmann, A. & Bar-Yosef, O. (2006). Early domesticated fig in the Jordan Valley. Science, 312, pp. 1372-1374.
- Roehl, E. (1996). Whole Food Facts: The Complete Reference Guide. Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press.
- Soofer Co. (2013). “ Sadaf dried figs.” Retrieved from <http://www.sadaf.com/sadaf-dried-figs-imported-56-6852/>