Grow Your Own Organic Figs
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1. Celeste and Brown Turkey are time tested varieties for east central Georgia.
2. Double dig a square area of 2’ X 2’ (minimum size) in mid December. If possible, choose a grassed area with fewer nematodes. A more protected site for a single bush is the south side of a house or building. Stay at least 20 feet away.
3. According to an early December soil test, work into the top soil lime, rock phosphate and green sand as needed. Mulch the area with 4-6” of hay or straw.
4. Late March plant a 3 gallon size potted plant, incorporate 2 pounds of vegetable meal or animal based fertilizer in a shallow trench around the root ball, and form a catchment basin to hold 5 gallons of water. Make sure that a tight root ball is loosened at the bottom before filling in the soil. Finish the planting by mulching a 3’-4’ diameter area with 4-6” of hay or straw. Replenish and extend the mulch every 4 months.
5. At planting prune back tall 6-8’ leaders to 4-6’ to encourage new suckers and laterals.
6. Provide 5-10 gallons of water weekly, April through September, especially the first 2-3 years.
7. Winter protect the young bush the first 2 winters by forming a Tepee of unpruned bamboo shoots tied with a spiral of twine and stuffed with 4-6” of hay. Maintain this cover from December until danger of frost is over in early April.
8. In mid February of the succeeding 3 years drip line fertilize with 3-5 pounds of organic fertilizer plus shallow trench composting with 3-5 gallons of vegetable kitchen scraps, if possible. Replenish and extend the mulch. At the fifth year and forward use 5 to10 pounds of organic fertilizer per bush.
9. Significant fruiting can be expected in the third or fourth years. Harvest figs every second or third day in July, making sure to remove and discard all over ripe and damaged fruit which attracts wasps and bees. Do this at each picking to minimize wasp build up. A six year old bush without bird netting at Boggs yielded about 110 pounds of fruit. Bird netting would help to save an additional 10-15 pounds.
10. When a 4 to 5 year old bush begins to develop congested branching, prune the tops out of the main lateral branches leaving outward directed shoots. Late March is the time to do this pruning to accomplish an open center with a 7 – 8 foot maximum height. Also prune two pathways into the bush. This increases sunlight into the bush resulting in sweeter, larger fruit, as well as making for easier picking.
11. In early May, overly vigorous fruit shoots may be pruned at the 5th or 6th fruit to maintain the bush height, make picking easier, and improve fruit size and quality. Begin at the center of the bush and work outward to avoid contact with the irritating white sap. Use protective goggles and gloves if needed.
12. Low limbs with heavy fruit may be propped with wooden or bamboo stakes.
13. Overgrown, 15’ – 20’ tall bushes can be pruned down to 12’ in the first year and down to 8’ in the second year.
14. Dehydration followed by freezing will help to preserve surpluses of figs in July.