



MARKETPLACE

Shop Smarter, Eat Better



TRY THIS

Fresh Figs

IF THE THOUGHT OF A FIG CONJURES IMAGES of dried fruit and chewy, packaged cookies, then chances are you've never enjoyed a fresh, ripe fig. Available from early summer into fall, fresh figs have a voluptuous teardrop shape, velvety, supple skin, and a fleshy inside that's studded with small, crunchy seeds. Naturally sweet and syrupy, figs are delicious eaten out of hand. They're also wonderful paired with salty meats, rich cheeses, or tart flavors. Give them a try, and you'll never think of figs in the same way again. *Continued on page 18*

A few fig varieties: from left, Sierra, Mission (whole and split), and Brown Turkey.

TRY THIS FRESH FIGS

Figs are an ancient fruit

Figs grow in Mediterranean climates on the gnarly branches of the *Ficus carica* tree, which is a member of the mulberry family. Though referred to as a fruit, a fig is actually a syconium, a fleshy structure that's filled with hundreds of tiny flowers; the true fruits of a fig are what we think of as its seeds. Most likely native to western Asia and widespread in the Mediterranean, fig trees are among the earliest known domesticated plants, dating back some 11,000 years.

Most figs sold in the United States are grown in California. Common varieties include the sweet, purple-black Mission; the mild-flavored Brown Turkey; the pear-shaped, chartreuse Kadota, which is often dried; the nutty Calimyrna, also bright green and a favorite for out-of-hand eating; and the Sierra, a new, thick-skinned hybrid similar to the Calimyrna.

Enjoy them as soon as possible

Figs don't ripen off the tree, so they're best when picked and sold at their peak ripeness. A ripe fig will smell sweet, feel soft but not squishy, and be free of blemishes; slight wrinkles and even small cracks in the skin are OK. Avoid very firm figs, as they're likely to be unripe. A milky substance near the stem end can also indicate that the fruit is not perfectly ripe.

Fresh figs taste best at room temperature, so keep them on the counter with space around them for air to circulate; they'll last for about two days. Refrigerated, they'll keep for a few more.

Prepare figs simply

The sweet flavor of figs pairs perfectly with rich ingredients like butter, cream, and nuts. It also balances salty flavors, which makes figs a welcome addition to a cheese plate featuring

cured meats and aged cheeses. Vinegar, citrus, warm spices, honey, and wine are other flavorings that play well with figs.

Versatile figs make a delicious addition to any meal. Stir chopped figs into yogurt or mix them into cream cheese for slathering on bagels. For a light lunch, quarter and toss them into a salad with arugula, crisp pancetta, and a tart vinaigrette, or add them to a pizza or a panini along with mozzarella and pesto.

For an easy but excellent appetizer, wrap figs in slices of prosciutto, or stuff them with goat or blue cheese to eat raw, grilled, baked, or broiled. To feature figs in a main dish, chop them and stir them into a pan sauce for duck or pork chops. Figs, perhaps obviously, also make a fine dessert. For an utterly simple finale, drizzle figs with honey and top with a dollop of mascarpone. Or use them in a delicately sweet tart like the one below.

—Melissa Denchak



honeyed fig and goat cheese tart

This is a simple but stunning way to enjoy fresh figs. When figs aren't available, you can make this tart with other fresh fruit, such as apricots, pears, or strawberries. Serves 6 to 8

Unbleached all-purpose flour, for dusting

- 1 sheet (half of a 17.3-oz. package) frozen puff pastry, thawed overnight in the refrigerator**
- 4 oz. fresh goat cheese, softened**
- ¼ cup honey (preferably dark)**
- 8 ripe, fresh figs (6 if large), preferably 4 black and 4 green, stemmed and quartered lengthwise**
- ½ tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary**
- Kosher salt**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 475°F.

Lightly dust a sheet of parchment with flour.

Unfold the pastry, place on top of the parchment, and lightly dust with flour. Roll out the pastry

to a 10-inch square. Prick all over with a fork at ½-inch intervals. Make a ¾-inch border on all sides by pressing the edge of a ruler into the pastry to mark it. Fold the pastry over at the markings to make a double-thick rim. Transfer the pastry on the parchment to a rimmed baking sheet. (The pastry can be prepared up to this point a few hours ahead and kept in the refrigerator.) Bake until the center is golden-brown and puffed, about 8 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine the goat cheese and 2 Tbs. of the honey in a medium bowl.

Spread the cheese mixture inside the border of the puff pastry. Arrange the figs on the cheese, alternating colors if you like. Sprinkle with the rosemary and ¼ tsp. salt. Bake until the rim of the pastry is golden-brown, about 7 minutes.

Drizzle with the remaining 2 Tbs. honey and cool for about 15 minutes before slicing and serving. —Jill Silverman Hough