



Crop Focus: Figs!

This week, we're switching gears from thinking about the impending winter and how to prepare for it, to dreaming about next year's harvest! Here at Grow Pittsburgh, we're lucky enough to have a heated greenhouse to work with over the winter, at the [Frick Art and Historical Center](#) in Point Breeze. We grow food in this space throughout the winter. And, the greenhouse allows us to easily grow tropical plants, like citrus, lemongrass, and cardamom! Stop in and see us sometime – visiting the greenhouse is free and open to the public Tues.-Sun., 10:00-5:00.

This year, we were lucky enough to acquire more than a dozen heirloom fig plants. Frick Greenhouse and Shiloh Farm Manager, Cassandra Morgan, repotted them and placed them around the greenhouse and they are thriving! Every plant has grown new leaves and most of them have sprouted fruits as well. As you are planning your garden for next year, keep in mind that Grow Pittsburgh will be happy to offer fig seedlings during our spring seedling sales.



A fruiting fig tree in the greenhouse at the Frick Art & Historical Center. Can you spot a large beneficial insect in this photo?

Figs are deciduous, which means they lose their leaves over the winter, so don't be alarmed when this happens! In this area, sometimes unprotected figs will survive a winter. But to help ensure overwintering success, you may want to tie up

the branches and stuff them with straw or leaves. Then wrap the whole shebang with burlap, canvas, or blankets. You can also mulch the ground to help keep the roots from freezing. Sometimes even if all the above-ground growth dies over the winter, the fig will re-sprout in the spring. Even though we have our figs in a greenhouse, these plants can be grown outdoors in the Pittsburgh area. Choose your site wisely; figs prefer at least 8 hours of sun every day. Planting them by a South-facing brick or stone structure can increase their odds of survival over the winter. Figs also grow well in large containers (at least 5 gallon), and can be brought inside, or to a slightly warmer area – like a garage, for the winter.



A close up of one of our fig trees, with a tiny fruit forming!

Figs prefer moderately good soil, with some organic matter incorporated. They like to be watered thoroughly, but let the soil dry between waterings. Prune them in late winter, before they begin their spring growth, by trimming back any “suckers” or new sprouts under the plant. You can also prune branches to make the fig tree more open, and remove any broken or crossed branches.

Figs produce at least once, and sometimes twice in a season. Different types vary widely in terms of coloring, but you will know when the fruits are ready to harvest, as the stem that connects them to the plant relaxes and the ripe figs sag toward the ground. Figs harvested while they are immature will not ripen off the plant. Not much beats a fresh fig, and since they don’t store well, they are best straight off the tree!