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News Release

Figs

Question: We added three new fig bushes last year and they are not producing any fruit yet. We didn't even see any blooms. Our other older bush which was here when we bought the place two years ago has fruit but it seems to be dropping off before it gets ripe. Have you ever heard of anything like this and is there anything we can do about either problem?

Answer: Figs have a juvenile period of up to three to four years before they produce a crop of fruit, so don't worry too much about your new plants as long as they are healthy and growing for the first three to four years. If you look for blooms on your fig tree you probably won't see them as they are usually inside the fruit.

As for the older plant there can be several reasons for an established fig plant to drop premature fruit or have a lack of fruiting.



1. Hot, dry weather that happens before the fruit has reached maturity can cause fruit to drop or be of poor quality. To prevent these problems figs will benefit from mulching and supplemental watering of one inch per week to help bring fruit to maturity.
2. Another reason for fruit drop could be variety. Many people prefer the taste of the variety Celeste for fresh eating, but unfortunately pre-mature fruit drop is one of the characteristics of this particular variety no matter how well the plant is cared for. Green Ischia, a late season fig, may also defoliate before the fruit has time to mature some years depending on the weather.
3. Over-fertilization may also cause pre-mature fruit drop, so if you are fertilizing and the plants seem excessively vigorous (distance between leaves on the current season's growth is more than three inches), stop fertilizing them.
4. An infestation of root-knot nematodes could also be causing problems with fruit production if grown in sandy soils. If you suspect nematodes contact me at the St. Clair county Extension office for assistance with this problem.
5. In rare cases you may have purchased a fig that requires cross-pollination (some California varieties) by a special wasp, if this is the case it will never set a good fruit crop

as this wasp will not survive our winter temperatures. Replace the plant with a local variety.

6. Some good varieties for Alabama are Alma, Eastern Brown Turkey, Celeste, Green Ischia, Hunt, Kadota, LSU Purple, and Magnolia.



When planting new fig plants, location may make the difference between success and failure. Figs need eight hours of sunlight during the growing season. In colder parts of the state protection from winter wind and cold temperatures will aid in survival. Planting on the south side of a building is recommended, leaving at least three feet of space between the building and the fig plant. Once you have decided on your variety of choice the most important step is to do a soil test. Figs prefer soil with a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. Mail the soil sample to the Auburn University Soil Testing Lab (soil testing kits are available at the St. Clair county Extension office) and they will send you the test results with recommendations; make the recommended adjustments to your site prior to planting.

Figs should ideally be planted while still dormant in the spring, adding no fertilizer at that time. Even though figs are considered drought tolerant, for healthy growth and fruit development they need one inch of water per week whether it comes from rain or irrigation. For moisture conservation and winter protection, four to six inches of organic mulch can be beneficial. Figs do not require regular fertilization; as a matter of fact heavily fertilized figs are more apt to sustain injury from cold and show signs of poor fruit development.

For fresh eating, figs should be harvested when their neck wilts and fruit droops; for preserving they should be harvested a few days prior to maturity. If you notice a white milky substance the figs are not quite ripe so check back often. For more information on growing figs and recipes for preserving figs please visit our website www.aces.edu/StClair. Just click on publications at the top and then search. Or, for additional information about figs please contact Wendy Ulrich, Lab Technician, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email ulricwg@aces.edu.