

Chicago Hardy Fig

Description: Though originally from Sicily, the Chicago Hardy tolerates the harshest winters of any cold-hardy fig. The Chicago Hardy is also known as the Bensonhurst Purple and can grow to 30 feet or be restrained so all harvesting can take place without a ladder. Figs are a member of the ficus family, and many varieties—including Chicago hardy—can also work well in containers or as indoor plants in a good, sunny spot. Given the sun and soil it needs, Chicago hardy can be a low-maintenance plant that has a long lifespan despite our summer and winter temperature swings.



Primary uses: Fresh fruit--delicious tossed with other fruits, on a salads or pizza, or added into baked goods.

Secondary uses: Figs make wonderful jams and preserves. They can be cut and prepared for freezing, to toss into smoothies or baked goods. Many figs can be dried, though less common with this variety.

Yield: With two harvests, this shrub can produce a high number of fruit for its size.

Harvesting: Figs picked before full ripeness will not continue to ripen. Ripe Chicago hardy figs are a deep purple and give a bit to the touch.

Storage: As they are picked when quite ripe, figs last only a few days and should be consumed quickly. After harvesting, they could be stored in the fridge for several days. Dried figs can then be stored for 6-8 months.

Plant type: Deciduous shrub

Leaf type: Large, large-lobed leaves

Hardiness: These figs are hardy to between 5 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Colder temperatures can cause damage. What dies back in winter, though, will regrow in spring. Trees can be grown low and "heeled in" in winter by bending branches over and covering all plant material with soil. Other growers wrap their trees for winter, though this may risk creating a home for rodents that nest in the wrapping material and damage the tree. Alternately, figs work well as a container planting if brought into a cool, dark, dry place to spend its winter dormancy before hardening back off with increasing outdoor time in the spring to prevent shock.

Cultivars/varieties: All figs originate in the Mediterranean climate. Chicago hardy is one of several hardy fig varieties and can withstand some of the lowest temperatures.

Pollination: Self-pollinating

Life span & fruiting: two harvests a year, in mid-summer (on previous year's growth) and late summer (on new growth) bears after 1-2 years; fruit will begin ripening in July and continue through the first frost; produces medium-sized, purple fruit with pink flesh

"Fruit produced on the older wood will appear in early summer and fruit on new growth will appear in early fall."

Growing conditions

Light: Full sun

Location: Figs prefer protection from the southern wall of a building, ideally positioned at the southeast corner.

Moisture: Prefers loamy, well-drained and fine-grain soil
pH: 6 to 6.5