

# Black Mission Franciscana Ficus carica



The Mission fig (also known as Black Mission or Franciscana) is a popular variety of the edible fig (*Ficus carica*). It was first introduced to the United States in 1768 when Franciscan missionaries planted it in San Diego. It was also planted in the subsequent missions that the Franciscans established up the California coast. Gustav Eisen writes, "The early padres and missionaries in the Pacific coast States cultivated no other variety of fig". It later became the main commercial variety planted throughout California. The Mission fig was later surpassed by the Sari Lop fig (also known as Calimyrna)

as the most popular commercial fig variety grown in California.

The Mission fig is a high quality fig variety. It produces both a breba and main crop, and is considered an everbearing variety when planted in the right climate. The breba crop is large. The main crop is medium-sized. It is a dark skinned fig with a strawberry colored interior. The skin of the fruit often cracks when it is ripe. The tree is long lived and grows to be quite large. It is sensitive to frost. Mission fig trees are almost always infected with Fig mosaic virus, which can affect the color and shape of leaves, but usually does not affect fruit production. It is still considered one of the highest quality figs that can be grown in USDA zones 9 and up in the United States.

Figs are a unique fruit resembling a teardrop. They're about the size of your thumb, filled with hundreds of tiny seeds, and have an edible purple or green peel. The flesh of the fruit is pink and has a mild, sweet taste. The scientific name for the fig is *Ficus carica*.

Figs — and their leaves — are packed with nutrients and offer a variety of potential health benefits. They may promote healthy digestion, decrease your risk of heart disease, and help you manage your blood sugar levels.

This article reviews figs, including their nutrition, benefits, and downsides, as well as how to add them to your diet.

# Fig nutrition

Fresh figs are rich in nutrients while being relatively low in calories, making them a great addition to a healthy diet.

One small (40-gram) fresh fig contains :

- Calories: 30
- Protein: 0 grams
- Fat: 0 grams
- Carbs: 8 grams
- Fiber: 1 gram
- Copper: 3% of the Daily Value (DV)
- Magnesium: 2% of the DV
- Potassium: 2% of the DV
- Riboflavin: 2% of the DV
- Thiamine: 2% of the DV
- Vitamin B6: 3% of the DV
- Vitamin K: 2% of the DV

Fresh figs contain some calories from natural sugar, but having a few figs is a reasonable, [low calorie snack](#) or addition to a meal.

On the other hand, dried figs are high in sugar and rich in calories, as the sugar becomes concentrated when the fruits are dried.

Figs also contain small amounts of a wide variety of nutrients, but they're particularly rich in copper and vitamin B6.

Copper is a vital mineral that's involved in several bodily processes, including metabolism and energy production, as well as the formation of blood cells, connective tissues, and neurotransmitters .

Vitamin B6 is a key vitamin necessary to help your body break down dietary protein and create new proteins. It also plays an important role in brain health



# Benefits

Figs have many potential benefits, including promoting digestive and heart health, along with potentially helping manage blood sugar levels.

## Promote digestive health

Figs have long been used as a home remedy or an alternative treatment for digestive problems like constipation .

They contain fiber, which may help promote digestive health by softening and adding bulk to stools, decreasing constipation, and serving as a prebiotic — or food source for the healthy bacteria populating your gut .

In animal studies, fig fruit extract or paste helped speed the movement of food through the digestive tract, [reducing constipation](#) and improving the symptoms of digestive disorders like ulcerative colitis .A study in 150 people with irritable bowel syndrome with constipation (IBS-C) found that those who consumed about 4 dried figs (45 grams) twice daily experienced a significant reduction in symptoms — including pain, bloating, and constipation — compared with a control group .

What's more, a similar study in 80 people found that supplementing with about 10 ounces (300 grams) of fig fruit paste daily for 8 weeks significantly decreased constipation, compared with a control group .

## May improve vascular and heart health

Figs may improve blood pressure and blood fat levels, which can help improve your vascular health and decrease your risk of heart disease.

One study found that fig extract decreased blood pressure in rats with normal blood pressure, as well as those with elevated levels .

Animal studies have also shown improvements in total cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, and [triglyceride levels](#) when supplementing with fig leaf extract .

However, in a 5-week study in 83 people with high LDL (bad) cholesterol, researchers noted that those who added about 14 dried figs (120 grams) to their diet daily had no changes in blood fat levels, compared with a control group.

More human studies are needed to better understand the relationship between figs and heart health.

## May help manage blood sugar levels

One dated study from 1998 in 10 people with type 1 diabetes found that having fig leaf tea with breakfast may have decreased their insulin needs. In the month they received fig leaf tea, their insulin doses decreased by about 12% .

What's more, a more recent study found that drinks containing high doses of fig fruit extract had a lower glycemic index (GI) than beverages with no fig fruit extract, meaning these drinks would have a more favorable effect on [blood sugar levels](#) .

However, fig fruits — especially dried figs — are high in sugar and may increase blood sugar levels in the short term. If you have trouble managing your blood sugar levels, you should limit your intake of dried figs.

## Potential anticancer properties

Many promising test-tube studies have been conducted on the effects of fig leaves on cancer cells.

Fig leaves and natural latex from fig plants have been shown to exhibit antitumor activity against human colon cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer, and liver cancer cells .

However, this doesn't mean that eating figs or drinking fig leaf tea will exert the same effects. Test-tube studies

offer a promising starting point, but human studies are needed to assess how ingesting figs or fig leaves **affects cancer growth**.

## May promote healthy skin

Figs may have some beneficial effects on the skin, especially in people with allergic dermatitis — or dry, itchy skin as a result of allergies.

One study in 45 children with **dermatitis** found that a cream made from dried fig fruit extract applied twice daily for 2 weeks was more effective at treating the symptoms of dermatitis than hydrocortisone cream, the standard treatment.

What's more, a combination of fruit extracts — including fig extract — was shown to exhibit antioxidant effects on skin cells, decrease collagen breakdown, and improve the appearance of wrinkles in a test-tube and animal study .

However, it's difficult to determine if these positive effects came from the fig extract or one of the other extracts being studied. More research is needed to determine figs' effects on skin health.



# How to add figs to your diet

There are a number of ways to add figs to your diet, each with its own potential benefits. Here are the four main ways you can include figs in your diet:

- Fresh. Fresh figs are low in calories and make for a great snack, and they're an excellent addition to salads or desserts. You can also make fig jam or preserves with fresh figs.
- Dried. [Dried figs](#) are high in sugar and calories, so they should be eaten in moderation. They may be more effective at treating constipation than fresh figs .
- Fig leaves. Although they may be difficult to find outside of specialty grocers, fig leaves are nutritious and can be used in a variety of ways. They're often used the same way grape leaves are, as a wrap for dishes containing rice, meat, or other fillings.
- Fig leaf tea. Fig leaf tea is made from dried fig leaves. You can make it yourself or purchase premade fig leaf teas online or in specialty stores.

You can enjoy figs in a variety of ways, but due to their high sugar content, you should only eat dried figs in

moderation or use them as an occasional home treatment for constipation.

