

# Pruning a fig tree

## ***Basic principles:***

- Ensure that there is sufficient light reaching the annual shoot growth.
- Do not cut the tips of the annual shoot growth.
- Increase the light in the tree by completely removing some of the secondary branches and pruning back long, non-fruiting branches.

## ***How to prune an established fig tree (winter pruning):***

- Do not cut the tips of the annual shoot growth. This is where the micro-figs will develop.
- Remove any dead, diseased or damaged wood (the 3 D's).
- Cut off suckers growing from the base.
- Cut off some of the secondary branches, especially those which form an angle less than 45° with the main trunk – these branches are not strong enough to be sustainable.
- Remove branches that cross other branches or rub against another branch.
- If there are a lot of long, non-fruiting branches, about a quarter of these can be pruned back to 2/3 inches length. Remember that fruit only develops on the new annual growth.
- According to the strength of growth, prune again, following the same techniques as above, in late May and again in late June if necessary.

## ***Background***

The fig tree is a fruiting bush or small tree originating from much warmer Asian countries. The Ancient Romans were familiar with figs and how to grow them and they spread fig tree culture to other Mediterranean countries. The winter frosts that occur today in the UK are not cold enough to kill the fig tree outright. However, the micro-figs at the end of newly-formed shoots, the current year's growth, are easily damaged by early spring frosts. **These micro-figs are the size of small peas, visible at the end of the new shoots, and they will become next year's crop.**

You will also see larger figs on the tree in November, when they will be the size of a chestnut. These chestnut-sized figs are no good, because the tree has already shed all its leaves and has closed down its growth for winter. So in November remove the chestnut-sized figs by hand to stop the tree holding on to those fruits.

The micro-figs are more likely to develop into successful fruits if the fig tree is protected against frost, for example if it is in a poly tunnel or greenhouse, or by the application of a fleece.

**The fact that micro-figs develop at the ends of new annual shoots leads to an important consideration. If, during the winter pruning of a fig tree, the tips of all the branches are pruned off, there will be no worthwhile crop of figs at all!**

### ***How to prune a newly-planted fig tree:***

- Plant the fig tree in a pot or container, the best time to plant is from November to March.
- Plan the method of protection against frost: wheeling the pot into a greenhouse or poly tunnel in winter months, or protecting new growth with a double layer of garden fleece at times when frost is likely
- Prune your new tree in April, cutting back all branches by about a third. The concept is to encourage the tree to channel energy into root development.
- In June, prune new growth back to 5-leaf length.
- Next winter, from November to March, select a few of the strongest branches, choosing those that are at least a 45° angle from the trunk, and cut off the others. The aim is to create a well-balanced, evenly-distributed structure, ideally with a bowl-type shape canopy.
- From the third year on, prune every winter as described below.

### ***How to prune a fig tree that is growing too tall but not fruiting:***

If a fig tree is planted without root restriction, after a few years it will channel most of its energy into new growth instead of cropping. This is difficult to correct but the fundamental principle is to increase the amount of light in the lower part of the tree, and reduce the total amount of energy available when the tree starts to grow in the spring.

- In spring, after leaves have appeared, remove all the basic strongly-growing branches that grew last year, with all their newly-formed leaves
- After 8 weeks, repeat the process
- Continue this process of summer pruning every year for the next 4 years

This will reduce the energy levels in the tree, and increase the intensity of light available for the remaining branches. The tree will gradually adapt to this regime and begin producing fruit at lower levels. It is a lengthy process and unfortunately no short cuts are possible.

[Text edited from <https://realenglishfruit.co.uk/fig-tree-pruning-how-to-trim-a-fig-tree/> ]