



The common fig, or *Ficus carica*, is native to the Middle East, where scientists believe it was the very first plant species cultivated by early farmers of the Neolithic age, more than 11,000 years ago. Over the millennia that followed, the species spread outward in all directions, becoming essentially naturalized, if not technically native, throughout the Mediterranean and Caspian basins and eastward toward Afghanistan.

The fig came to the New World as horticultural baggage of the Spanish and Portuguese, and the species made its way across the continent with the missionaries. Fig trees reportedly arrived in California in 1769. For the next century, the trees—mostly of a few varieties, including the ubiquitous Black Mission—were confined to farms, private gardens and mission churchyards.

Then, near the end of the 19th century, something remarkable happened: Fresno-area farmers planted Turkish fig varieties in the hope of launching a competitive dried fig industry. However, the trees' fruits failed to ripen year after year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture investigated. The agency's scientists conducted some studies, took some cruises to the Mediterranean, and in the late-1890s solved the mystery. Turns out certain fig varieties, such as those then planted around Fresno, require pollination—plus the presence of nearby hermaphroditic fig trees, called caprifigs, which produce pollen—in order to produce ripe fruit. So, the agency intentionally introduced fig wasps and caprifigs into the San Joaquin Valley, and by the turn of the century, the region's Turkish fig orchards were producing heavy crops of ripe fruit.

The effort was successful, but it had an unforeseen consequence: Because fig pollination, also called caprifigation, makes fig seeds fertile, the introduction of the wasp to California allowed the state's fig trees to sexually reproduce.

Seedlings began sprouting as they do in the Old World—that is, almost everywhere.

The author takes cuttings from a wild fig tree in Northern California.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALASTAIR BLAND

Fig trees sprung from sidewalk cracks, rubble, irrigation ditches, creek gullies, suburban yards, hollows in other trees and, perhaps more than anywhere else in the state, the fertile, moist soils of the Sacramento River valley.

"We have these huge thickets of figs out here," Scofield said.

He browses these *Ficus* jungles regularly during the fruiting season—what he calls "fig safaris." His grandkids sometimes join his scouting expeditions, and Scofield says they've become adept at spotting trees in the distance.

"They'll shout, 'Papa! There's a fig tree!'" he said.

Scofield guesses that just one wild fig in a thousand will produce fruit worth noting on social media, but he has found several. A few years ago, he came across a wild fig tree laden with plump green fruits with jammy, berry-red pulp inside. He named it Thermalito, and it has since become a collector's item.

More recently, Scofield found a fig that he swears is the best fruit he has ever tasted. He named the fig Angelito, and he mailed cuttings to just one other grower, Eric Durtschi, a fig collector who lives in the suburbs of Santa Barbara.

Durtschi became interested in figs back in the summer of 2018, and in barely two years, he acquired 800 fig varieties—a collection he has since halved.

"I tend to go all-in when I try something new," he said, noting that he previously



Drive-through MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

We would love for you to join us and be a part of our drive-through parade. Decorate your car and pay your respects to the men and women who served our country with a drive through one of our beautiful memorial parks.

Monday, May 31st, 10:00a – 2:00p

- ★ Prizes awarded for most decorated vehicles ★
- ★ Enter to win a brand new Nex 4 burner gas grill ★

Avenue of Flags along Mangrove Ave compliments of VWF Post 1555
This event is free and open to anyone in the community.
Mark your calendars. We hope to see you there!

Social distancing and safety protocols will be strictly adhered to during the event.



Chico Cemetery • 881 Mangrove Avenue • 530-345-7243 • ChicoCemetery.com
Glen Oaks Memorial Park • 11115 Midway • 530-343-3002 • GlenOaksMemorial.com

Dahlmeier Est. 1948
INSURANCE AGENCY, INC.
Insuring a Strong Community
LICENSE #0680951





Protect your goodies.

Learn more at Dahlmeier.com

Insurance & Risk Management Services for:
Farms • Business • Life • Health • Home • Auto

<p>Chico 1368 Longfellow Ave 530.342.6421</p>	<p>Oroville 2080 Myers St 530.533.3424</p>	<p>Willows 305 N. Culver Ave. (Lambert Insurance Agency) 530.934.3361</p>
---	--	---