

Fig Propagation

Instructions for potting and growing your fig cutting.

High success rate. No pre-washing, mold control, shuffling, potting up, root formation monitoring, or otherwise babying the cuttings. Use of readily available inexpensive supplies (potting mix and containers, shop lights for growing).

Supplies

- 1/2 to 1-gallon pots
- Lightweight potting or rooting mix
- 1" Parafilm (nice to have but not necessary) available on ebay

Rooting Method

Cut the cuttings into pieces to fit your pot or leave them as received.

You can use any size pots or containers, taller is better. I have used (2) liter soda bottles (with drain holes in the bottom). 4x4x9" tree pots are commonly used, because it offers a lot of soil surface (height) for roots to shoot out. Tall pots are better for long cuttings.

Use cuttings around 8-9" long for 9" tall pots. You don't want the cutting touching the bottom of the pot but do want as much of the cutting under the soil as possible.

Cut about a quarter to a half inch above the top to help keep the buds from drying out. Paraffin can also be wrapped around the exposed cutting above the soil.

Cutting length should allow 1-2 buds above the soil surface, ideally just 1, but it's okay if you have more (some cuttings have closely spaced buds). I have had good success with long cuttings which had their exposed surfaces wrapped with paraffin.

Fill the pots with a loose potting mix and thoroughly water the mix

Most soilless potting mixes will work fine, but you can increase your chances of success with a high-quality potting mix like Pro Mix MP (biofungicide + mycorrhizae). It's an OMRI mix that seems to have a decent nutrient charge to get the cuttings going and doesn't seem to dry out too fast.

Use Pro Mix MP, Pro Mix BX, Pro Mix HP or Berger BM1 or OM1., fairly inexpensive, didn't contain fungus gnats like I've seen with other mixes, and seems to work well. You can add a little coarse perlite if you feel it's too "heavy".

Pre wet and mix potting soil before filling container, otherwise they tend to repel water.

Pre-wet the soil, let the water drain out thoroughly (sometimes overnight). This allows you to make sure soil is consistently and thoroughly damp.

Wrap what will be the exposed end of the cutting (the part sticking out of the soil) in parafilm down to about 1" below the soil level

Not everybody has access to parafilm, but if you do it will improve your chances of success

Parafilm prevents the buds and wood from drying out prematurely. Since the parafilm is breathable, mold never forms. The stuck cuttings aren't placed in any sort of humidity dome.

Parafilm stretches really well, make sure to stretch it well over the exposed buds. The pressure of the swelling and opening bud will break through the parafilm if it's stretched well.

Parafilm is the only "odd" supply needed here. I use the 1" width and find cheap rolls on eBay. 1 roll should do 100+ cuttings as you're only covering the tips.

Remove the parafilm later in the year while potting up when the new tree has outgrown its pot.

A note about tip cuttings: If your cutting contains the tip of a branch (a pointy vegetative bud) I usually remove it, as the parafilm wrapped around it will tend to constrict it (unless you wrap it a different way) and restrict it from breaking bud properly.

Stick the cuttings in the soil and thoroughly wet the soil until water runs out of the bottom.

Rewater when the top inch of the soil is dry (probably in a few weeks, depending on the humidity of the rooting place). Only rewater enough to dampen the soil, do not drench the soil again.

Cuttings can be stored in the dark until the buds start to swell and open. At that point, introduce them to lights. There shouldn't be any drawback to placing them immediately under lights (other than the cost of running the lights)

Any light source will work. I use cheap fluorescent shop lights placed directly above the

Water as needed, and only as needed.

Water only when the top inch of the soil is dry. Overwatering can kill an otherwise good cutting by causing it to rot before it roots

Remember that cuttings starting out don't need much water. You're just trying to maintain high humidity in the mix to force the cutting to push out roots.

Don't fret if a newly pushing out cutting loses a leaf or two. I've seen them recover.

Once a cutting is growing vigorously (has put on and kept 4-5 leaves) it's far less sensitive to overwatering so feel free to water it well.

That's it! Seems like a lot, but there's no babying, no monitoring (besides for water), no mold issues, no supplies beyond potting mix, pots, and parafilm.

FAQ

Do I need to wash or sanitize my cuttings? With this method, no. This method allows you to root in a way that discourages mold growth as there's no elevated humidity. The only reason to wash or sanitize cuttings is if they were stored for some time and were showing some mold in storage.

Do I need to score or wound my cuttings or use rooting hormone to encourage root formation?

Is not necessary with figs, though it may benefit and doesn't hurt.

How do I prevent or deal with fungus gnats? Start with a bagged, dry mix, preferably a compressed bale. Starting with clean media is the best thing you can do. If you begin to see fungus gnats, you may be leaving the mix too soggy.

What are the downsides of this method? I've only found one: you can't monitor root development. I think this is likely a really good thing, as formation of roots (or lack thereof) probably causes premature action to the detriment of the cutting. At least half a dozen cuttings were pegged for being dead but ended up surviving. They originally pushed out a few leaves that withered and fell off. In many cases these cuttings shot up growth from below the soil level a month or so later after I set them in the "probably dead" pile.

Tips

Don't give up too early: Some plants will push out a leaf or two only to drop it. Many of these recovered and pushed out more leaves with no intervention (humidity chambers, etc).

Lighting: Position the lights as closely to the plants as possible, moving them up only as the plants begin to grow into the lights. You can use cheap T12 shop lights (around ~\$10 at a home improvement store) and hang them from adjustable chains.

Fertilizing: you can fertilize plants when they really take root and start to grow. Use 3 strong leaves as a guide. For fertilization, use a slow release general purpose fertilizer to get them going. Initially add about a teaspoon or two per plant and add more when the plants seemed to need it.

Terminal Buds: If you have a cutting taken from the end of a branch, it will have a terminal leaf bud (the pointy bud at the end of a branch). I've read that these can cause issues with perhaps delaying or inhibiting rooting,

Pictures

Pictures are worth a thousand words, so check out some of the photos below to see growth progress and some shots of the parafilm wrapping.

PARAFILM-WRAPPED CUTTINGS JUST STARTING TO PUSH OUT A LITTLE



CUTTINGS PUSHING OUT THEIR FIRST SET OF LEAVES. NOTICE HOW THE BUDS JUST PUSH THROUGH THE PARAFILM.



NEW HEALTHY FIG TREES 4-5 MONTHS IN. MOST CUTTINGS WERE STARTED IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY.

