

SEASONAL STARS



Jeremy Norman blogs about travel and musings about modern manners and everything in between. Thankfully some of those musings focus on the wonderful world of food. Here he

writes about the fabulous fig which will soon make its appearance on our trees. Follow his musings on <http://gurujaywisdom.blogspot.com>

Last August we were in the Sporades in Greece. It was sweltering hot as we clambered up a hillside overlooking the sparkling Aegean. The climb was arduous so we sought shelter under an umbrella pine to admire the view and tuck into our picnic. We had brought a basket covered with a cloth to sit on. Inside was a hunk of fresh, nutty bread the colour of olive wood, some cheese, local yoghurt as thick as cream, ham, salami and, of course, a bottle of chilled white wine - perfection.

We inhaled a sweet smell of sap on the breeze. It came from a fig tree growing out of a nearby rocky outcrop. It was gnarled, probably older than us, and planted by nature not by man.

There is nothing to beat the honeyed taste of figs that have ripened on the tree. We picked some plump, purple ones hanging low but still unblemished. They proved to be the perfect accompaniment to our simple shepherd's lunch.

IN PRAISE OF



Good fresh figs can be hard to find, they are either under-ripe or mushy. Above all other fruits, figs must be eaten at their evanescent moment of perfection. Best of all is the primal satisfaction of eating food foraged for free.

If you live in northerly climes, you may have a fig tree that seldom gives ripe fruit but don't despair; you can make delicious green fig compote to eat at breakfast or as an accompaniment to cheese.

A lesser treat are dried figs, they make a good snack but chop them fine and allow them to macerate in a good balsamic vinegar overnight and you have a condiment fit for a prince.

Figs go well with Parma ham, or better the Pata Negra from Spain cured from pigs that have foraged on wild acorns. Figs go with most cheese but I like them best with Gruyere. You can bake them and serve them with thick cream or yoghurt – they make a fine desert; try adding a drop or two of vanilla essence to attain perfection.

A lady friend told me sternly that you should never wash figs as they deteriorate rapidly when wet; I don't know if this is so but certainly it is prudery to peel them before eating - their lasciviousness is best savoured au naturelle.

There is a well-known Caravaggio in the Borghese gallery in Rome. A beautiful boy cradles a bowl of fruit topped with a fig both are bursting with lusciousness. To my mind there is neither sight nor smell quite so redolent of warm Mediterranean summers and the simple pleasures of eating al fresco than the fig.

Pluck your figs delicately don't squeeze them too hard. Pick a fig leaf too; you never know when one might come in handy.

Some Served suggestions:

Split and stuff with goats' cheese and almonds, drizzle with maple syrup and bake. If you don't feel like stuffing them then add to any cheese board. Figs also go particularly well with soft cheeses and 'Burrata'. Figs also pair well with prosciutto crudo, fennel, watermelon, butternut squash and most salad leaves to name a few