With a smooth outer skin and soft chewy interior, this small fruit has a delectably sweet flavor that complements a variety of foods and tastes great raw or cooked. Although considered a fruit, the fig is actually a flower that is inverted into itself. The seeds are drupes, or the real fruit. Figs are one of the oldest fruits known to man and were thought to be sacred to ancient civilizations. *Ficus carica*, known as the common fig, originated in northern Asia Minor. Figs were originally used as a sweetener before refined sugars were invented. Spanish missionaries brought the fig to America in 1520, hence, the popular Mission fig.

Figs are easy to grow in warm climates, but produce their best fruit in Mediterranean climates with hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. There are hundreds of varieties, all having in common a soft flesh with a multitude of tiny edible seeds. Fresh figs are available May through December; dried figs are available year-round. They are good sources for calcium, fiber and antioxidants, and can also be used as a laxative.

### Varieties and uses

- **Adriatic**: These figs have thin green skin and strawberry-colored flesh. Their high sugar content makes them the prime choice for fig bars and pastes.
- **Black Mission**: Best eaten fresh, these figs have dark-purple skin, watermelon-pink flesh and a full, sweet flavor. Fresh Black Mission figs are available mid-May through November. They dry well too.
- **Brown Turkey**: Medium to large in size, these figs have purplish-brown skin with soft pink flesh and a robust flavor. Fresh Brown Turkey figs are available mid-May through December.
- **Calimyrna**: Also called Smyrna when from Turkey, these figs are large with green skin, white flesh and a nutty, sweet flavor. This variety is the most popular in dried form. Fresh Calimyrna figs are available July through September.
- **Celeste**: As a medium pear-shaped fruit, these figs have purple skin and pinkish pulp. Peak season is July to August.
- **Kadota**: These figs have yellowish-green skin and creamy amber-colored flesh with a light, delicate flavor. Fresh Kadota figs are available June to October.
- **Magnolia**: These large figs with pinkish-yellow flesh and amber skin are popular canning figs, with peak season from July to August.

### Healthy ingredient contribution

**ANTIOXIDANTS**: Among dried fruits, figs and dried plums are rich in antioxidants and rank with other high antioxidant foods, such as red wine and green tea, which are well-known for their polyphenolics.

**CALCIUM**: Figs are rich in calcium and are excellent calcium alternatives for people who are allergic to dairy products. Calcium and potassium present in figs prevent bone thinning and help promote bone density.

**FIBER**: Figs are rich in dietary fiber, which makes them effective for a weight-management program. The soluble fiber, called pectin, helps in reducing blood cholesterol.

**POTASSIUM**: The rich potassium content of figs helps to maintain the blood pressure of the body.
Storage
Fresh figs are perishable and should be kept refrigerated. The skin is fragile, and often scars during the growing period from the leaves rubbing against the fruit. These marks do not hurt the flesh inside. Use fresh figs as soon as possible. Under ideal conditions, fresh figs will store for as long as 5 to 7 days, or frozen in a sealed bag/container for up to 6 months.

Serving size
One hundred grams of fresh figs has 74 calories, 3 grams fiber, 35 mg calcium and 0 grams fat. One cup of dried figs contains 186 calories, 2 grams protein, 7 grams fiber and 121 mg calcium.

INGREDIENT OF THE MONTH

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RECIPE

FIG COMPOTE BRUSCHETTA WITH KIWI MANGO RICOTTA

Yield: 20 servings (serving size: 2 bruschetta)

Ingredients:
Ricotta
- 2 kiwis, peeled, chopped
- 1 mango, peeled, chopped
- 1 (16-oz.) container part-skim ricotta

Compote
- 1 cup peach nectar
- 1 cup orange juice
- ½ cup dried strawberries, chopped
- 6 dates, chopped
- 10 dried Turkish figs, chopped
- ¼ cup dried cherries, chopped
- ½ cup dried apricots, chopped
- 40 (½-inch-thick) slices French bread baguette, toasted (about 8 oz.)

1) To prepare ricotta: put kiwi and mango in food processor; process until smooth, scraping sides of processor bowl occasionally. Put fruit purée in small saucepan over medium heat; cook 10 to 15 minutes or until thickened. Remove from heat; let cool to room temperature. Transfer to mixing bowl; mix with ricotta. Chill.

2) To prepare compote: Combine nectar with the next 6 ingredients (through apricots) in small saucepan; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat; simmer 10 minutes or until figs are tender. Uncover; cook 5 minutes or until mixture thickens. Remove from heat; cool to room temperature.

3) Top each bread slice with 1½ teaspoons fig compote and 1½ teaspoons ricotta mixture.

Nutrition Information
- Calories: 120
- Fat: 2g
- Sat. Fat: 1g
- Carbs: 23g
- Fiber: 2g
- Sugars: 10g
- Protein: 5g

Vitamin A: 8%
Vitamin C: 40%
Calcium: 8%
Iron: 4%

This recipe was created and tested by Clemson University’s Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.