

Gill had experienced trouble years earlier sourcing fig trees – and it was still a problem. With little or no info available on growing figs commercially the couple decided to grow their own. This meant propagating cuttings sourced from all over the place, then trialling the trees to see what grew best in this area.

Adopting an organic style orchard (no sprays or fertiliser) seemed to work – the trick being lots of water (not on the leaves or fruit) and good mulch in the form of cut grass.

After ten years of toil the Drakes now have 300 trees planted on three acres, comprising their four top varieties – Adriatic, Black, French Sugar and Forage Paddock.

Another 11 varieties are in the pipeline; the long term plan is to plant out all 15 acres (hence the company name Fifteen Acres Figs).

Fig season runs March through to mid-May. So with just the two of them, 300 trees spitting out figs and a design business to run, things can get a bit hectic. Once things get a bit bigger, the next step will be to hire some staff and, who knows, maybe even supermarkets might be stocking them in the future. Plans are also underway to produce dried figs and jams, etc.

The figs are presently available from a roadside stall at the orchard and the Kerikeri Farmers Markets on Sundays. They are also sold to a growing number of Northland restaurants. ■

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Photo: Bryce Zhang

**FRESH FIFTEEN ACRE FIG WITH PROSCIUTTO, WHIPPED GOATS CURD, MACADAMIA & ROCKET**

**Ingredients (serves 4)**

- 8 Fresh figs
- 8 Slices of Prosciutto
- 180g Goats curd
- 100g Macadamia roasted & chopped
- 200g Wild rocket
- 100mls Olive oil
- ½ Lemon

**Method**

1. Place goats curd in a bowl. Season with lemon and salt to taste, then whip to dropping consistency.
2. In another bowl add rocket, nuts and sliced figs. Dress with lemon & olive oil.

**To Serve**

Divide the rocket and fig salad between 4 plates, then arrange prosciutto and finish with goats curd.

**BAKED FIG & ALMOND TART WITH VANILLA BEAN ICE CREAM & FIG HONEYGAR**

**Ingredients (serves 4)**

- 10 Fresh figs
- 2 sheets Puff pastry
- 100g Ground almonds
- 50g Muscovado sugar
- 50g Butter (browned but not burnt)
- ½ Lemon
- 100g Manuka honey
- 10mls Good red wine vinegar
- 50g Icing sugar
- 4 scoops Vanilla bean ice cream

**Method**

1. Roll out puff pastry very thinly. Then cut 4 saucer-size rounds and refrigerate until needed.
2. Purée two of the figs, then reduce over the heat, adding the almonds, muscovado sugar and butter to form a paste. Cool down.
3. When the almond paste is cool, spread it on the puff pastry rounds, leaving a 1cm gap around the edge. Then slice the remaining figs into rings (save trimmings) and lay overlapping on the paste. Dust with icing sugar and bake in a hot oven until pastry is golden.
4. In a pot, bring to the boil the honey, vinegar and all fig trimmings. Reduce a little, strain, then cool. Check the taste should be slightly sweet-sour to offset the sweet tart and ice cream.

**To Serve**

Place the warm tart in the middle of 4 plates. Top with ice cream and drizzle with the fig honeygar.





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