



Small figs grow on one of Dave Marable's fig trees.

You can and should grow figs

If you think of figs as plants that grow only in the California, around the Mediterranean and in other hot, dry places, you should see Dave Marable's garden.

Dozens of fig plants flourish around his yard in Snowball Gate, most of them no more than 3 feet tall. "I have them planted all over the place, and at a certain point I just give them away," Marable says.

He'll be doing that Monday, when he gives a talk on figs at the monthly meeting of the Trevoze Horticultural Society. The program will include planting and pruning information, a slide show and samples of fruit from this year's crop.

Marable gets about a dozen figs from a single plant, but since he has them all over the yard — 16 in one bed alone — that can still be a substantial harvest. Marable has been a fig lover all his life, and he's happy to have his own supply.

Marable's figs all started with a clump he dug up from the garden of Sylvia Kaskey, one of his neighbors in Snowball Gate. He rooted it and planted it in his garden, where it soon produced leaves and, after a year or so, figs.

The plantings spread on their own, putting up new shoots nearby, but Marable also makes more plants by digging up clumps with roots attached. "I produce maybe four or five dozen a year," he says.

He doesn't baby his fig trees or give them any special protection over the winter. And he doesn't worry when the plants are still bare and leafless in early summer.

"They might look dead, but then you notice a little green spot," Marable says. And before long the little trees put out leaves and start to grow again.

According to Marable, anyone can grow figs, and they're so good for you, everyone should. If you don't have a garden, you can even plant them in large pots.

Marable hopes his talk convinces others to give growing figs a try. "I'm going to be giving away one of my figs for adoption."

Dave Marable will present a talk and slide show on figs Monday at the monthly meeting of the Trevoze Horticultural Society. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium at Wood River Village, Hulmeville Road and Bensalem Boulevard, Bensalem. Donation is \$3 for non-members. Call 856-866-9163 for information.



Dave Marable collected many of the plants and even the bricks and blocks in his yard from friends and neighbors in Levittown. ART GENTILE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Living History

A Snowball Gate garden preserves plants from Levittown's past, and memories of those who grew them.

By BETTY CICHY
STAFF WRITER

The yard around Dave Marable's house is a living museum, a monument to the people and plants that have made their home in Levittown over the last half century. He even has a name for it. "This is my Little Levittown," he says.

Marable, a retired Pennsbury art teacher, is an avid collector of stories and memorabilia from the community's past. His passion for Levittown history is so well-known that people will drop off their original Cobalt Ridge door if they're remodeling or call up and invite him to sift through their discards before they move.

The Snowball Gate resident has displayed his Levittown memorabilia at dozens of exhibits around the area. But his other collection — a landscape full of trees and plants that once grew in the yards of the community's longtime residents — is difficult to pack up and show off, so far fewer people have seen it.

"No one knew I had the bushes," Marable says.

But bushes he has — pink- and red-flowering rhododendrons, boxwoods, yews and more, some of them preserved from the

early days of Levittown. Each new home sold in one of Levittown's sections in the 1950s came with its own meticulously planned landscape, which included shade trees and evergreens, flowering shrubs and perennials.

Abraham Levitt and his sons, William and Alfred, wanted their new community to have a parklike feel, with greenery as far as the eye could see. Abraham was a gardener at heart, and he chose the plantings that were put in place around each house.

"Levitt put almost \$8 million in plant material into Levittown," Marable says. Within a few years what had been woods and farmland was transformed into a thriving landscape of neat, yet surprisingly diverse, suburban gardens.

William Levitt called his father "the Johnny Appleseed of the 20th century," Marable says.

The homeowners were supposed to maintain the lawn and gardens according to the original design, and many of them did at first. "Everybody was into gardening," says Marable, whose parents moved into a home in Willowood when he was 4.



A grapevine in Marable's backyard once grew on a trellis in Lakeside.



Kiara Marable, 8, Dave Marable's granddaughter, walks along a path made of fireplace bricks from homes in the Oaktree section of Levittown. A well-trimmed yew (right) is one of many shrubs in Marable's collection of original Levittown plants.

