What's inside a fig?

Artwork by Sarara Dewan

Have you ever questioned why you've never seen flowers on a fig tree?

Figs are unique in the plant world by creating flowers inside an enclosure called a ***syconium*** (plural = syconia). It's this inside-out ***inflorescence*** (clusters of flowers) that we call fig 'fruits' when they are ripe and ready to eat.

Fig syconia can come in a variety of shapes and sizes, depending on the species.

They all have the same basic design in common:

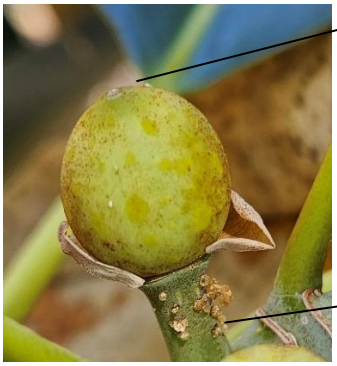

Fig (syconium) external view

Fig (syconium) cross sectional diagram

Fig syconia (inside out clusters of flowers) connect to the branches they grow along by a ***peduncle***. This attachment structure varies in length, depending on the species of fig.

On the opposite side of the syconium from the peduncle is the ***ostiole***. An ostiole is an opening that can allow fig wasps to enter into the syconium to pollinate the clusters of tiny flowers (sometimes called 'florets') inside. Each syconia can contain tens to thousands of flowers, depending on the species (Borges, 2021,) which are never seen from the outside.

Ripe fig 'fruit' (syconium) opened to show individual structures and remaining fig wasps

Reference:

Borges, R.M. (2021). Interactions Between Figs and Gall-Inducing Fig Wasps: Adaptations, Constraints, and Unanswered Questions. Front. Ecol. Evol. 9:685542. doi: 10.3389/fevo.2021.685542