Fig mosaic

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WHILE fig production on a commercial scale is very limited in Western Australia, there is a wide distribution of trees grown singly or in small groups in orchards, farms and home gardens.

Figs are popular because they are easily propagated and maintained and are affected by relatively few diseases. However one disease that is widespread and sometimes causes concern to growers is fig mosaic.

Symptoms
Leaves of mosaic-infected trees show symptoms which vary from a light and dark green mottle or mosaic (Fig. 1) to a pronounced yellow and green mottle (Fig. 2). There is a tendency for the dark green areas to be raised like blisters (Fig. 3). The pale coloured areas on leaves sometimes take the form of rings (Fig. 4) or of irregular line patterns (Fig. 2) with occasional narrow brown zones around the margins.

Besides affecting leaf colour the disease may cause slight to severe leaf malformation, resulting in small misshapen leaves.
The intensity of the symptoms often varies widely between different leaves on the same tree. Fruit markings may take the form of spots up to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter.

Premature leaf dropping occurs in certain circumstances, thus exposing the limbs and fruit to the sun’s rays. This may result in sun cankers on the limbs and in blemished, low quality fruit.

**Cause and Spread**

Fig mosaic is caused by a virus which multiplies in the cells and becomes distributed throughout most parts of the tree. Once infected, a tree remains so for the remainder of its life. As fig trees are almost universally vegetatively propagated the virus is spread through propagating young trees with cuttings, suckers, buds or grafts from infected parent trees.

A fig mite (*Aceria ficus*) has been shown to transmit the disease in California but as yet this mite has not been recorded here. No transmission is known to occur through the seed or by tree cutting tools.

**Control**

The disease can be avoided by careful selection of mosaic-free parents as sources of cuttings, suckers, buds or grafts for the propagation of young trees. There is no spray, dust or similar chemical treatment which will cure an infected tree.
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