



## Figs and Ferragosto

**It's fig-picking time here in Italy, and I get a significant amount of my daily snacks from the fig trees that are all over the place here.**

*Rick Gush*

Friday, August 21, 2009

It's fig-picking time here in Italy, and I get a significant amount of my daily snacks from the fig trees that are all over the place here.

The photo is of a plate of figs from our own tree that I'm going to try to dry. One can see the sugar covering the outsides of these really sweet fruits. I also find a fair amount of other figs free for the taking as I walk around Rapallo.

It's sort of a Ligurian tradition to have a fig tree growing out of a rock wall in one's garden, and there are hundreds of walls around here that have figs growing out of them. Very seldom does one see a fig tree growing on flat land here, as flat land is too valuable to waste by letting a fig grow on it.

Our figs are little black ones and are really sweet. I get them all to myself because my wife and mother-in-law don't like the little black figs and instead prefer the huge green figs that appear most often in the markets.

I find plenty of the big green figs too, and I eat both types equally eagerly. My wife delicately peels all her figs before eating them while I just wolf down the whole figs skin and all.

August 15 is a big holiday in Italy called Ferragosto. This ancient holiday is attributed to Emperor Augustus, and represents the end of the hard spring and summer seasons' work. The Italians take this break very seriously, and this date finds almost all Italians on vacation.

Driving around cities like Milan and Rome is amazing in August because the streets are all empty and the shops, bars and restaurants are all shuttered. This is because all the residents are at the beach.

In August, the population of Rapallo swells to ten times its normal size when what seems like all the residents of Milan come to enjoy their vacation apartments here on the coast.

Of course, the Catholics try to put a religious face on the holiday, and they celebrate the date as the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, or the date on which Mary ascended into heaven. There are lots of religious processions involving carrying the huge crosses followed by food festivals and fireworks.

I regret to admit that I'm so jaded that I didn't take my wife to the fireworks this year because by the time they started the show I was already in my pajamas as usual at that hour, thinking about how I should graft some big green fig scions onto our fig tree one of these years.

All in all, I'm a pretty exciting guy.

<<More La Dolce Vita>>