

Pawpaw

PawPaw is the only fruit-bearing specie in North America representative of the tropical custard apple family. The Paw Paw is a small shrubby tree.

The dark, smooth bark, spotted with gray, is sometimes broken in places. The large, toothless, oblong to lance-shaped, alternate leaves are large with a tropical look. In the springtime, just before or when the leaves develop, dull-purple, large bell-shaped, stalked flowers emerge from the leaf axils of the previous year's shoots. Flowers are pollinated by flies. (Planting near a compost pile can help with pollination.) Pollination can be helped and thus production greatly improved by pollinating with a paintbrush. The Paw Paw's bumpy, irregularly oblong, aromatic fruits are 3 to 7 inches along and 1 to 2 inches thick, and resemble a papaya. They ripen in late summer or autumn, turning yellow, dappled with brown spots and often powdered by a whitish, powdery bloom. Peel the skin, and a sweet, aromatic pulp comes oozing out. Rows of large, flat, brown seeds lie inside.



Planting: Grow PawPaws close to each other (at least 2 for fruit production). Grow with garden tarp or in an area where they'll receive shade the first year, and full sun after growing taller. Deer may be your only pest problem, as they eat the leaves.

Harvests and Uses: PawPaws are not commercially cultivated due to their poor ability to ship and store but are heralded as a delicious, "tropical" treat. People eat them fresh, dried, baked, chilled/frozen like ice cream, as jams, jellies, juices, and can be fermented into beer, brandy, or wine. The bark has been traditionally used to make rope and fibers. PawPaws are high in calories and carbohydrates. Paw-paw fruits are rich in minerals such as magnesium, copper, zinc, iron, manganese, potassium, and phosphorus. The fruit also contains abundant concentrations of Vitamin C, proteins, and their derivative amino acids. PawPaw also makes an excellent dry, white wine. It can be made from fresh or canned fruit. One plant can yield 25lbs of fruit. Not everyone can tolerate the unripe fruit, so be sure to harvest only when they are ripe. Some people experience contact dermatitis from the paw paw skin, so be mindful and wear gloves if sensitive.

Minimum Spacing: 6-8', 25' max from another paw paw tree

Height: 12-35'

Spread: 12-35'

Light: prefers sun first year and half; then prefers full sun

Shade: tolerates moderate shade but performs better in full sun

Moisture: adaptable/medium; water in drought

pH: 5.1-7.0

Pollination & Propagation: must have at least 2 for pollination; sends up shoots or suckers potentially away from base; pollinated by flies

Harvest begins at: 4-6 yrs

Interesting Growing Considerations: pollinated by flies; pollination is helped by people; must grow with other paw paws; can plant as close as 3' according to some sources. Needs shade in first year and a half, so consider planting on north side of a fence or hedge row, or use garden shade in open field.