



PAWPAW

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INTRODUCTION

Another rare find. The Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is one of this country's most over-looked fruits. Native to most parts of the United States, the Pawpaw thrives with little or no care. It is a small (12-20 feet tall), deciduous tree with a pyramidal shape. The fruit is 4 to 5 inches long with a custard smooth, white to apricot flesh. Delicious and complex banana-like flavor is awesome. The fruit is usually eaten fresh, but may also be used for making custard pies and preserves.

PAWPAW POLLINATION

Pawpaw pollination is worth knowing something about. Now these are truly strange trees. Two trees are needed for cross-pollination. Their favorite pollinator is the green bottle fly. Some growers have gone to great lengths to attract this shy creature. One noteworthy method is to place rotten hamburger in buckets around the tree for a few weeks before bloom to build up the fly colony. Whew! Must be a better way! (We also hand pollinate using small brushes to transfer pollen between trees).

USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Pawpaw trees are an under story tree with a neat pyramidal shape (to 20 feet tall) and tawny-gold fall leaf color. So add them as a lower layer in your edible forest of chestnut, mulberry and pecan. Spot them in clearings in your woods, where they'll get some shade when young. They are small, so you can fit them into a restricted area along a fence or tree-line. Or add them to your butterfly garden—they are a host plant of the fabulous Zebra Swallowtail.

PLANTING AND CULTURE

SITE SELECTION

Pawpaws prefer acidic soil with good organic content. Avoid heavy, wet, clay or alkaline soils. Young trees require partial shade, so choose a place with filtered sun or with shade from the west. Or you can put plants under shade cloth for the first two years, after which they actually prefer full sun. Plant 15-20 feet apart for best results—these will be small trees that need to be close to one another to fruit successfully.

SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING

Pawpaws prefer slightly acid soil (pH 4.2-5.5) with good organic matter content. If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test.

Dig a planting hole approximately twice as big as the pot and twice as deep. Enrich the planting hole with acid mulches like peat moss, leaf mould or pine bark mixed with soil dug from the hole (50:50 mix). Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. The trees should be planted **at or slightly above** the same level at which it grew in its pot. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below).

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of acidic mulch. Pawpaws have a deep tap root and are difficult to transplant—use care in handling your new plant to keep the root ball intact.

FERTILIZATION

We use and recommend the Espoma line of organic fertilizers. Espoma's Holly Tone is a good choice for Pawpaw trees. When not available look for an organic mix that contains an analyst of roughly 4-3-4. Make sure they contain iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to type and age of plant, so read the instructions on the bag and fertilize accordingly. Be sure to spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant avoiding a 2-inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. For Zones 8a-10, fertilize 3 times each year in February, May and late July/early August. For plants further north (Zone 7), fertilize 2 times each year in March and June/July. Never fertilize after August (July in Zone 7) as this will promote new growth when the plant needs to go dormant.

WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new tree. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply. Pawpaw should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production. Growth will be fastest in moist, but well drained, conditions.

PRUNING AND CARE

Pawpaws have few pests and diseases. Occasional pruning is necessary to open the center of the tree for greater light and air penetration. Remove crossing, dead or damaged branches as needed. In adult trees, periodic pruning to stimulate new growth is done to enhance fruit production, because fruit is produced on the previous season's growth.

HARVEST

The ripe fruit is soft and thin-skinned with a sweet fragrance. It should yield easily to a gentle squeeze and the green skin has usually lightened in tone. The fruit may develop blackish splotches, but these do not affect flavor or edibility. Pawpaws ripen in August-September.

VARIETY SELECTION

SEEDLING We gather the seed for this variety from the North Florida area. It reliably fruits in Zones 8B and 9. Fruit varies in size from 3-5 inches with a pale yellow flesh. Excellent flavor. Two trees are required for pollination. Ripens late August-September. Zones 7-9.