

Pawpaw

Asimina triloba

Papaya

Growing wild in our Eastern US forests, Pawpaw produces the largest fruit of all native trees. The fruit can reach one foot in length and one pound with a custard texture and banana/pineapple flavor. The fruit is more nutritious than apples, peaches, or grapes measured in vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and food energy value. Once plentiful, they are much rarer today as development clears native forests. Earliest documentation of Pawpaws dates to de Soto's 1540 expedition of the Mississippi where he wrote of Native American cultivation of the tree. Lewis and Clark would later write of its role helping save them from starvation. The fruit was very popular in the 1800s, but due to its short shelf life, is all but unknown in stores today. The largest Pawpaw tree is claimed by New Jersey.



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, simple, oblong, pinnately veined, 8-12 inches long and 4 inches wide. Deep tropical green turning yellow in autumn.



Bark/Wood

Smooth, brown, spotted with wart-like pores, often with light gray patches. Wood is light, weak, and easily broken.



Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; self infertile. Inconspicuous green flowers turn purple and become quite large. Elongated, green fruit up to 1 pound and nearly one foot long.



Form

Small tree with a pyramidal or rounded form. Prone to multiple leaders and can be shrubby as well.



Uses

Attractive landscape and ornamental plant with exotic and tropical looking foliage. Modest commercial fruit potential. Fruit is easily bruised and does not travel or store well.

Ethnobotany

Cultivated by Native Americans throughout its native range. Valued food source for early settlers. Credited with saving Lewis and Clark from starvation on their return trip. Figures into songs of the 1800s.

Native Distribution

Mississippi Valley north to Michigan, east to New Jersey.

Establishment

Pawpaw does not transplant well bare root.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 20'Hx15'Wx1'dbh
 USDA Zone 5-8
 Light Requirements Part to Full Sun

Soils
 Drought Tolerant?
 Inundation Tolerant?

Diverse
 Moderate
 Yes

Pests/Damaging Agents

No pests of concern.

Similar Species

Propagation

Seed - long dormant period breaking in August. Layering and root cuttings successful.

Source(s)

Transplants from Northwoods Nursery, Molalla, OR.