

PAW PAW, A NATIVE FRUIT TREE

The Paw Paw, whose scientific name is *Asimina triloba*, is native tree to the Eastern United States. Nine *Asimina* species are native to the United States, but only *A. Triloba* extends into northern states such as Michigan. It is found on the edges of woodlands and along streams. It grows up to 30 feet in height, with large, oval shaped leaves which turn yellow in the autumn. The 3-5-inch yellow fruits have a sweet, banana-like flavor, and contain several large seeds.

Wild plants occur as small under-story trees with gangly, spreading branches. In full sun, Paw Paws assume a narrow to broad, conical shape. Paw Paws often produce suckers a few feet from the trunk, which will establish a “Paw Paw patch” if left to grow. The leaves are large (up to 12 inches long) and are a lush dark green and turn an attractive yellow in the fall. Paw Paw flowers are protogynous — the stigma is receptive to pollen before the pollen is shed. This usually results in poor fruit set. Hand pollination with an artist’s paint brush can help overcome this. The natural pollinators of Paw Paws are believed to be flies and beetles. A little perseverance may be required to locate a desired cultivar.

University researchers have been developing the Paw Paw as a commercial fruit crop. The fruit are very high in vitamin C, many minerals and amino acids. Paw Paw varieties which produce larger fruit include Davis, Overleese, and Sunflower. The Overleese variety produces fruits that weigh one pound or more.

The Paw Paw is considered difficult to transplant because of its deep root stem. It is recommended that homeowners purchase small 3-5 ft container grown trees. The trees should be planted in the spring. The Paw Paw does best in a moist, fertile soil. It can grow in deep shade and full sun as long as the soil is moist.

Ref: MSU Extension Website, Extension Bulletin E-4727, Unusual Fruit Plants for Gardens in the North Central Region

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