

The Paw Paw

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This native fruit deserves more attention than it has had in the past. Even within its range many people are unacquainted with it. Land owners in some cases don't even know about it, even though there are paw paw thickets on their farms.

The range of the paw paw is rather extensive in spite of its being subtropical. It is found in southern Michigan in the first four tiers of countries and extends through Ohio east to the Atlantic, South to Florida, and west to eastern Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

It is thought that ancient tribes, being pursued by their fiercer neighbors, carried them as food as they moved north. This seems to be borne out since paw paws are usually found on the water courses or on the bluffs, and around old Indian camp sites. These are good places to search for superior strains.

It belongs to the custard apple family, and will only propagate on its own rootstock with the exception of the Chermoya which grows in Florida and purely tropical environment.

It is a thicket grower in its natural state, putting up sucker sprouts as the roots spread out. Some clumps have been observed that covered a quarter acre of ground. However the paw paw will grow a single trunk if the sprouts are kept down until the tree begins to bear and slows down in vegetative growth. It then becomes one of the most beautiful small trees that there is, with its pendulous elliptical leaves from five to ten inches in length. The tree assumes a pyramidal shape, making it ideal for home plantings. It seldom exceeds twenty five feet in height.

The blossoms of the paw paw are a maroon color and vary from slightly over an inch to nearly two inches in diameter, and appear in late May and early June. They are pollinated by night flying insects or moths and this may account in part for the shy bearing qualities of the paw paw. Although one clone consistently bears heavy crops, this is rare, and its flavor is poor.

There seem to be two distinct types. One has greenish flesh, and the other has yellow flesh; and it is from the latter that named varieties have been selected. The "Davis" and "Overleese" are yellow fleshed varieties and, have characteristics that are superior to most paw paws. The green fleshed type is usually sweet, but is sickeningly so. As in the case of all wild fruits, there are far more poor ones than good. It is the poor ones that give the paw paw a bad reputation.

The offshoots of the parent plant are very difficult to transplant. It is best in the long run either to plant the seed and graft the desired selections, or to order named varieties from a reputable nurseryman. If seeds are planted they should never be allowed to dry out. It is best to plant as soon as the seed are extracted from the fruit. The planting site should be a good rich loam liberally supplied with humus, and the seed should be planted about one inch deep in the fall. The site should be kept moist and partially shaded. The seed will sometimes germinate the following July.

The paw paw grafts readily, with about eighty percent takes, when the buds on the stock are swelling. The whip and tongue method seems to give the best results.

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When planting paw paws it must be born in mind that they require a deep rich loam, but that they will grow well on lighter soil if it is built up properly. The transplanted trees must have a high percentage of roots, and the roots should never be allowed to become dry. The tops should be severely pruned back and watered liberally the first season.

If you make inquiries about outstanding paw paws, you may hear of fruit six inches or more in length. A paw paw this large is very rare. The writer has never encountered one of these giants. The largest one on record weighed sixteen ounces, and was found by Elizabeth Ann Bartholomew of West Virginia University. They are more apt to weigh in the neighborhood of three to four ounces. They are born in clusters of one to six.

When ripe the fruit is greenish yellow, turning nearly black. It bruises very easily, and should be gathered just as it begins to soften and allowed to ripen fully in a cool dry place. They do not have to be frosted. The pulp freezes well, and is not altered in flavor in the process. The paw paw has large seeds and is well endowed with them.

We must remember it is a fruit that has had very little attention from the plant breeders. The fruits we are familiar with weren't very attractive to man in their wild state. Nature is stingy with outstanding qualities in her fruits and nuts. The privilege of improving on nature is man's place in the great scheme of things. Davis is the only variety that, to my knowledge, is available commercially.

Winter Hardiness of Apple Varieties

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Tree fruit growing area of British Columbia experienced a severe test during the winter of 1964-65 when in mid-December the temperature suddenly dropped from above freezing to -16°F ., as recorded at Summerland. The low temperatures were accompanied by very high winds, their combined effect resulting in tree damage, particularly to twigs, fruit spurs, and trunk on the north side.

In well-matured apple trees the damage to fruit spurs generally was extensive. Spur killing or injury varied considerably with varieties, and in most cases was in line with the known overall tree hardiness. The extent of spur killing and damage was evaluated in the spring and data on some varieties are given below. The varieties are classified into five hardiness groups, from very hardy to tender;

the damage to fruit spurs varied in these groups from none to very severe, with most or all spurs killed in the tender group. It should be kept in mind that each test winter is different and that relative hardiness of varieties may vary somewhat in each test. However, our knowledge of varietal hardiness is the accumulation of data from different areas in different test winters.

The spur-type mutants and tetraploids of certain varieties that were available for observation suffered more than their parent varieties. The spur damage of various spur types of Delicious was slightly but consistently higher than that of the standard Delicious. The tetraploids of Delicious, Golden Delicious, McIntosh, Melba, Spartan, Winesap, and Yellow Transparent were considerably more tender than the corresponding diploids.

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