

Chapter 4. Less Commonly Grown Fruits

Minor fruits, such as quince, persimmon, and pawpaw, are sometimes grown by homeowners who are interested in unusual or hard-to-obtain fruits. Some of these are native to Ohio and surrounding areas, though more fruits of foreign origin (yet suitable for midwest conditions) are becoming available through commercial nurseries. Several of the fruits listed here have attractive blossoms or foliage as well as edible fruit, making them good multi-purpose plants as part of an edible landscape. They also tend to be good for wildlife plantings. Whether gardeners have a large open field or just a few extra square feet, planting some of these lesser grown fruits can be fun and possibly add a new experience to a gardener's palate.

Pawpaw

A native plant, the pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) was known to Native Americans and early explorers alike. The pawpaw flower is dark lavender to purple-red and is very attractive upon close inspection, hanging like a little hat in mid-spring. Pawpaws are sometimes referred to as the custard apple or poor-man's banana.



Figure 103. Pawpaw flower.

Photo courtesy of the Ohio State University Extension Nursery, Landscape, and Turf Team.

The nutritious fruit produced by this tree ripens from mid September till frost and varies somewhat in flavor and size among the different cultivars. Most commonly the flavor is described as banana-like or even like a combination of banana, mango, and pineapple. The fruit is normally three to six

inches in length (the largest fruit of any native fruit tree) and has large seeds surrounded by the edible custard-like pulp. The skin is not edible.

The fruit may be used in making breads, pies, puddings, cookies, ice cream, or simply eaten out of hand. The pulp also freezes well so it can be used at a later time.



Figure 104. Pawpaw fruit.

Photo by Scott Bauer, USDA/ARS. Used with permission.

The large leaves of this pyramidal-shaped tree also make it desirable as a landscape plant. By removing the suckers that will grow from the root system in the first few years of growth, the pawpaw can be grown as a tree, or the suckers can be left to grow, resulting in a hedge or thicket of pawpaw plants. A seedling may take as long as six to eight years before producing fruit, and two unrelated pawpaws are required for pollination.

Because pawpaws do not transplant well, potted plants tend to establish better than bare-root, field-dug seedlings. Grafted cultivars are also more likely to remain true to strain than are seedlings. The pawpaw can be grown in full sun or partial shade and does best in moist but well-drained soils. Aside from picnic beetles, raccoons, deer, and other wildlife that enjoy feeding on the ripe fruit, the pawpaw is considered to be pest free.

Because the pawpaw has a short shelf life (two to three days at room temperature or no more than three weeks in the refrigerator), fruit do not ship well. It is likely that you will only be able to enjoy the flavor of this native fruit if you grow it yourself.