

Asimina triloba: Pawpaw¹

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Introduction

A native deciduous tree, the coarse-textured pawpaw ultimately reaches 30 feet in height (more commonly 15- to 20-feet) with an equal spread, and creates an upright, wide pyramidal silhouette. The large, dark green leaves, 6- to 12-inches in length and 3- to 5-inches wide, seem to droop from their weight at branch tips, giving the plant a distinctive, almost wilted appearance. Leaves turn a sometimes-brilliant yellow before dropping in the fall. The two-inch-wide purple flowers with the less-than-pleasant perfume appear before the leaves unfurl in springtime, and are followed by the production of unusual, fleshy, 3- to 5-inch-long, round or oval fruits, green when young but ripening to a brown/black, wrinkled texture. When fully ripe, the edible flesh becomes soft, almost custard-like, has a sweet, rich taste similar to bananas, and is surprisingly very nutritious. The fruits are popular with man and wildlife, especially raccoons and birds.



Figure 1. Young *Asimina triloba*: Pawpaw
Credits: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Asimina triloba*

Pronunciation: uh-SIM-min-nuh try-LOE-buh

Common name(s): Pawpaw

Family: *Annonaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5A through 8B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: reclamation; specimen; fruit

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

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Description

Height: 15 to 20 feet

Spread: 15 to 20 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: upright/erect, round

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: obovate, oblong

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches, 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

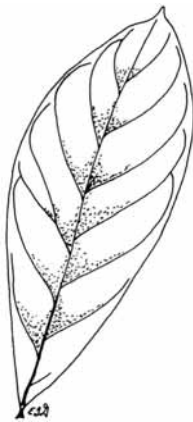


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: purple

Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: brown, black

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade, shade tolerant

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

Use and Management

The pawpaw tree will grow in full sun or dense shade but will have denser growth in the sun. Branches arch and reach to the sun in shaded sites, often creating an open, irregularly shaped canopy. The soil should be rich, moist, and slightly acid, and the trees will even tolerate wet, soggy soils. It can be found in multi-stemmed thickets along stream banks and on flood plains in the wild. The tree is probably best used in a natural area for stabilizing stream banks and to add yellow fall color to a landscape. It also makes a great coarse-textured specimen.

Propagation is by seeds, layerings, or root cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.