



## Papaya (Pawpaw)

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**Name:** Papaya (pawpaw) *Carica papaya* (Caricaceae).

**Origin:** Papaya is native to tropical America, originating in Southern Mexico and Costa Rica.

**Distribution:** It is widely grown in many tropical and sub-tropical countries around the world especially between the latitudes 32° N and 32° S.

**Australian Distribution:** Mainly north and central Queensland and the Sunshine Coast, around Kununurra in Western Australia and around Darwin in the Northern Territory.

**Preferred Climate and Soil Types:** Papaya is tropical and prefers warmer climates, but can be grown in warm frost-free areas in southern Queensland. It prefers deep porous loam to sandy loam soils with a high organic content. Soil must be well drained as waterlogging leads to root rots.

**Description:** The plant is herbaceous with a soft wooded single stem, and grows to 4 m. A crown of large, palmate leaves, grow directly from the trunk. There are two distinct plant types, most are dioecious which have male and female flowers on separate plants, and require both plants to produce fruit. Some are gynodioecious and have flowers that are either female or bisexual with both male and female parts on the same flower, and can be self-pollinated. Female flowers form singularly in the leaf axis, and male flowers are borne in bunches on long pendulous racemes.

**Varieties:** There are many different varieties available and different varieties are suited to different growing areas. Varieties suited to NT conditions are NT red, the Hawaiian Sunrise Solo and yellow.

**Culture:** Plants are grown from seed sown into seedbeds, or suitable containers, in a good seed raising mix. Plants are planted out into mounded rows with two to three plants per sit. When the plants are old enough to identify which is male and female, the male plants are removed leaving one male for every 10 females. Plants should be planted in the early dry season and soil should be kept moist until plants are well established, sometimes watering twice a day when necessary. Trees should produce their first crop at 9-12 months and produce for two to three years.

**Pests and Diseases:** Some common pests of papaya in the NT are oriental scale, which can disfigure the fruit, red spider mite and fruit fly. Diseases that affect papaya are root rot and stem rot and ripe fruit rot.

**Fruiting Season:** Fruits all year in Darwin.

**Harvesting:** Fruit is harvested at the first sign of colour and will continue to ripen after harvesting. Green fruit are harvested as an Asian vegetable, as are flowers and leaves.

**Storage Conditions:** After harvesting fruit is cleaned and treated for fungal infections and fruit fly. Papaya is ripened with ethylene gas, which produces an even colour and reduces the incidence of fruit rot. Papaya should be stored and transported at 13°C at 90% relative humidity.

**Culinary Use:** Mostly consumed as a fresh fruit, but can be canned, dried, pureed or made into jams and pickles. It can be eaten green as a vegetable and the leaves can be used as a meat tenderiser. The milky latex is used in the manufacture of chewing gum and various medicines, and in the brewing and tanning industries. The seeds can be ground up and made into a salad dressing.

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