

Growing pawpaws

How to make a pawpaw thrive:

1. Plant in a place with lots of light, but during the first 2 years provide shade from 10-3 from June to mid August.
2. Pick a spot where the soil drains well. There should be no standing water after a downpour.
3. Pawpaws have large leaves and like relatively sheltered spots.
4. Space the trees 8-10 feet apart if you want to have a row. If you plant them very far (20+ feet) pollination will not be as good.
5. Pawpaws love soil rich in organic material. If your soil is a bit sense, dig a tapered hole at least 20 inches deep (12 for the height of the pot, and another 8 to provide a easy to penetrate layer under the tree), and mix compost or peat moss in with the soil you dug out from the hole. Back fill until the hole is about 10 inches deep, and compact. If the seedling root ball is 12 inches tall, this leaves 2 inches for settling and the tree will be level ground over time.
6. Take the outer container off the seedling, but leave the inner container around the root ball. Sprinkle some soil in the hole and place the seedling in the hole. Back fill about halfway and gently compact for support, before carefully removing the inner container. **The roots of the seedling will NOT hold the soil together very well**, so be careful to hold the tree upright and carefully back fill to support the root ball from falling apart. Compact the soil as you back fill.
7. Water thoroughly to make the soil settle as much as possible.
8. Mulch.
9. Place a 2 ft cage made of chicken wire around the tree to protect the tree from rabbits and to be able to attach shading material. If the tree is planted in sunny spot, attach a piece of white plastic on the top of the cage on the South side and adjust the shade and/or cage so shade is provided from 10-3 in July. At some point, as the tree gets bigger, the leaves may start rubbing against the cage. Make sure the cage is not sharp where the leaves rub, and move the cage so that the tree is rubbing least.
10. No need for any pruning or fertilizing, but of course adding compost and/or compost tea is great.

Pawpaws like deep loamy soil. So if you don't have that, the bigger the hole and the more compost you work in, the faster the tree will grow and you will get fruit in 4 instead of 6-7 years. In an area with only 12 inches of top soil, and solid clay underneath, pawpaws can still thrive when a deep (20 inch) hole is dug and backfilled with half compost/half topsoil.

When planted in a shady place with limited direct sunlight, the tree will grow slowly, and it will take many more years before you get fruit. The trees will also grow much more sparse. In direct sun, the tree will have dense foliage and have more fruit.

Once the trees are bigger, they are not so sensitive to too much water and sun. However, bucks may damage 3-4 year old trees with their antlers, breaking branches and rubbing off bark.

How to kill a pawpaw tree:

1. Plant a 1-2 year old tree in full Sun. Somewhere in July, during a dry spell, the Sun will scorch the leaves and they will drop off. Thinking the tree is dead, you move over it or pull it out.
2. Plant the tree in a soggy area. The tree may be ok-ish the first year, but then in spring it won't come back, or come back and wither away.
3. Don't mulch. Deep cracks may form in the earth around the tree during dry spells, drying up the roots. If the tap root has not gone deep enough yet, the tree may die.