

## **Post Rock Answers**

**By Cassie Thiessen January 20, 2023**

### **Post Rock Extension District Horticulture Agent**

#### **Pawpaw Trees - A Native Fruit**

Are you looking for new plants to add to your garden this year? Pawpaw trees are native to Kansas, yet many people in the state have never eaten one. The fruits resemble fat bananas and are generally up to 6 inches long and 3 inches wide. Pawpaws have a creamy, custard-like flesh with a complex combination of tropical fruit flavors. They are most commonly described as tasting like bananas combined with a mango, pineapple, melon, berries, or another fruit. You haven't seen pawpaws in grocery stores because they are rarely grown commercially, they are hard to ship and store. Ripe fruit will only hold 2 to 3 days at room temperature and up to a week under refrigeration.

In the wild, the pawpaw is an understory tree and may do better with partial shade, especially during the first 2 to 3 years. The trees also benefit with protection from high wind due to their large leaves. The pawpaw is a small tree that may reach 20 feet high but is less broad. Trees require cross-pollination and so at least 2 and preferably 3 different varieties should be grown. Pawpaws are pollinated by insects such as beetles and flies and must be planted close together. Trees should be no further than 30 feet apart in order for good pollination to occur.

Pawpaws thrive in rich, moist soil. Amend the soil with organic matter in the area where the trees will be planted. You may want to treat the entire area, such as a 10- by 10- foot square. Add 2 inches of organic matter to the surface of the soil and then rototill in. Pawpaw trees prefer a well-drained, moderately acid (pH 5.5 to 7.0), moist soil.

The planting hole should be the same depth as the root system but 2 to 3 times as wide. Pawpaws have fleshy roots and are better planted in the spring (April) rather than fall unless container grown. Container-grown plants can be planted virtually anytime.

As with all plants, make sure to keep newly planted pawpaws well watered. The soil should be moist but not waterlogged. Apply mulch around the tree to help the roots become established. Keep the planting area completely free of weeds or any other type of vegetation within 3 feet of the trees.

When purchasing trees, it's important to pick named varieties, they will be of a higher quality. A few common cultivars include 'Shenandoah', 'Sunflower', and 'Pennsylvania Golden'. More information on growing pawpaws and where to purchase them is available from Peterson Pawpaws at ([petersonpawpaws.com](http://petersonpawpaws.com)). Neil Peterson's pawpaws are the result of over 25 years of research and have been widely tested. To learn more about pawpaws or discover other unique plants for your landscape, stop by or call your local Extension Office.

*Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at [cchiessen@ksu.edu](mailto:cchiessen@ksu.edu) or by calling Beloit (785-738-3597).*