

Guide To Evaluating Pawpaws¹

The PawPaw Foundation - 1990

The more one eats pawpaws and the more one goes a-pawpawing, the more one discovers that not all pawpaws are created equal. There is a surprising diversity among pawpaw trees. Some are better, some worse, than the vast majority of pawpawkind. A few rare and exceptional individuals are very *very* good, and a few (less rare it seems) individuals are very *very* bad. While some trees seem never to bear fruit, others bear heavily and almost every year. And while a few trees have fruits that taste heavenly -- sweet, smooth, delicate and fragrant -- most taste merely good, and a few taste truly terrible, combining the flavors of turpentine and tea. Some fruits are mostly seed, some mostly flesh. Some trees bear large fruits, some small. A few trees bear in mid-August, most in September, a few in October or later.

In evaluating pawpaws the eight traits to bear in mind are the four F's and the four S's. The primary traits to study are the four F's. The four S's are slightly less important.

FRUITFULNESS

FLAVOR

FRAGRANCE

FLESHINESS

SIZE OF FRUIT

SEED SIZE

SIGHT & APPEARANCE

STRANGE PECULIARITIES

The table and figures below are guides to help the inexperienced pawpaw hunter judge pawpaw fruits, and to help the experienced pawpaw hunter select in more systematic fashion those varieties worth tagging, propagating, and including in a germplasm collection. If you suspect a tree is superior, you should measure and make a record of its traits. A fair evaluation will be based on the average of a representative sample of fruits from the tree (about 6 in number) and will include small, medium, and large in the same proportions as they occur on the tree. Another and quicker way to do it, is to take 10 or so representative fruits, arrange them according to rank (from smallest to largest) and then select the top, bottom, and middle sized fruits for measurement. A worthy tree will be above average in two or more traits, or else will possess some unusual peculiarity. Your record of the tree will become a means of communicating with others about what you have found, and will be a description that will enable horticulturists to identify properly the varieties that are being propagated.

1. A revised version of an article originally published as "A Pawpawer's Guide to the Universe," by R. Neal Peterson, 1989, in Pomona (the NAFEX Quarterly) 22(1):63-65. Edited for web page in 1999 by Snake C. Jones.

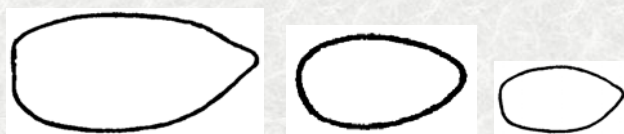
A PAWPAWER'S GUIDE TO EVALUATING PAWPAWS

	BAD	AVERAGE	GOOD
FRUITFULNESS*	under 5 fruits per tree	10 to 20 fruits per tree	over 40 fruits per tree
FLAVOR	not very sweet, mushy texture, insipid flavor, turpentinish, bitter	sweet, soft texture, intense flavor, may be too rich, bitter aftertaste	sweet, firm texture, delicate blend of flavors, rich but not cloying, no bitter aftertaste
FLESHINESS	visually: mostly seed. by weight: more than 15% of the fruit is seed**	visually: about half seed. by weight: around 10% of the fruit is seed**	visually: mostly flesh. by weight: less than 5% of the fruit is seed**
FRUIT SIZE	under 4 ounces	6 to 8 ounces	over 10 ounces
SEEDS	15 or fewer seeds per oz., av. seeds as large as 1-1/2" (4 cm) long	2.5 to 30 seeds per oz., av. seeds as large as 1" (2.5 cm) long	over 45 seeds per oz., av. seeds as small as 3/4" (2 cm) long
APPEARANCE	brown and black skin; discolored flesh; knobby, uneven shape	green or yellowish skin with brown mottling, yellow flesh	bright clear colors, no brown mottling (ripe); even, symmetrical shape

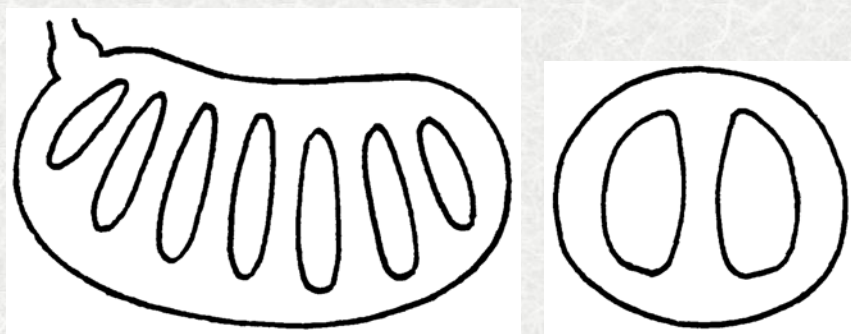
PECULIARITIES	SKIN: waxy/ fuzzy/ thick and hard/ yellow/ bluish. FLESH (ripe): white/ pink/ red. SEEDS: in a single row. RIPENING TIME: early (mid-Aug)/ late (mid-Nov). KEEPING ABILITY: keeps 2 or more weeks in refrigeration without losing eating quality. ETC.
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*Ideally, fruitfulness should be measured over a 3 or 4 year period.
 **Seed should be weighed fresh, before losing moisture to the air.

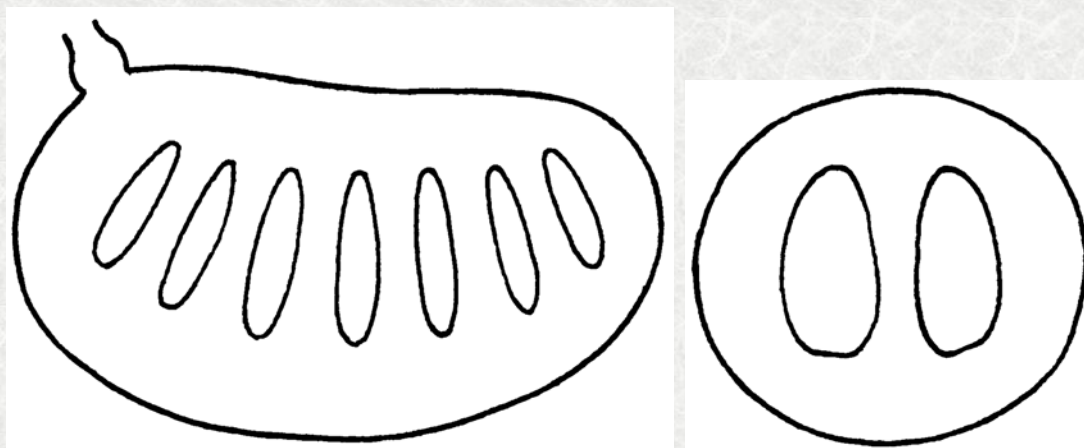
Large, medium, and small pawpaw seeds:



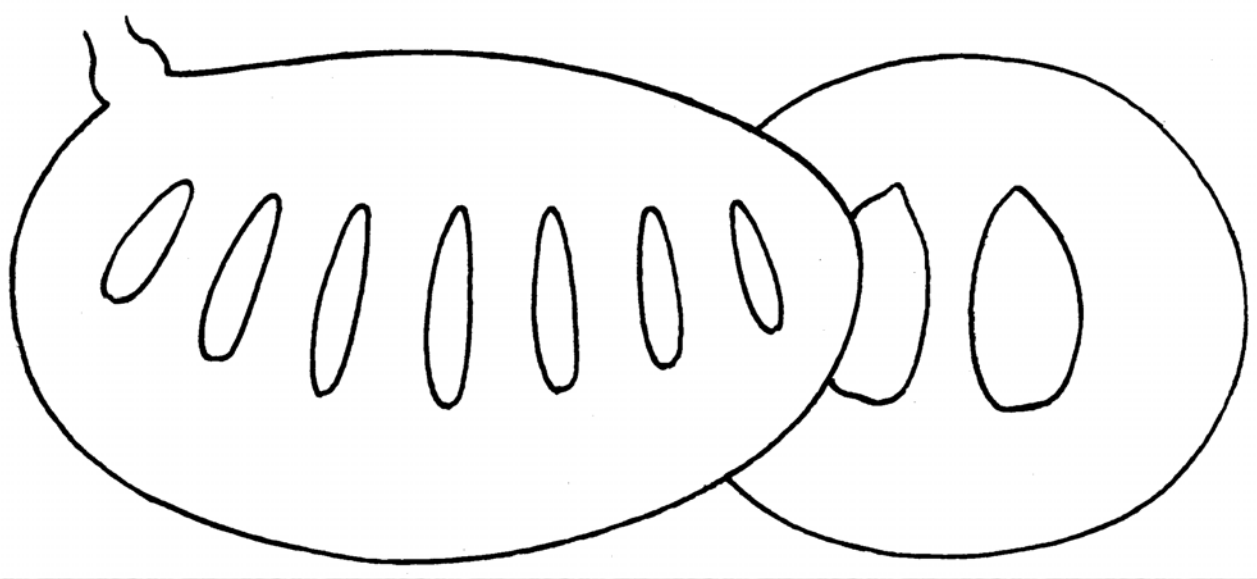
Small, medium, and large pawpaw fruit, cut lengthwise and crosswise:



Small fruit, very seedy



Medium sized fruit, slightly above average fleshiness



Large fruit, very fleshy

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