

## Pawpaws in the Kitchen

*The PawPaw Foundation - 1990*

**USES.** The primary use of pawpaws is for fresh eating. The easiest way to eat them is to cut them in half and scoop the flesh out with a spoon; the large seeds, scattered throughout the flesh, are then simply spit out. On a hike or picnic, you can tear an opening into one end and squeeze the flesh into your mouth. In cooking, the pawpaw is best suited to recipes that require little or no heat. Because the pawpaw's flavor compounds are very volatile, prolonged heating or high temperatures destroy their characteristic flavor. Pawpaw works well in ice cream, sorbet, chiffon pie, and mousse, and combines well with mint. On account of its flavor resemblance to banana, it may be substituted in recipes such as banana bread.

**RIPENESS.** Ripe pawpaws have a pronounced aroma that can fill an entire room (the way cantaloupe does) with a fragrance that is fruity and floral. When ripe, the fruits are soft and yield easily to a gentle squeeze like a ripe avocado or peach. Visual clues of ripeness are sometimes subtle: the skins turns a lighter shade of green and may show some yellow. In the late stages of ripeness the skin develops brown blotches, streaks, and freckles like a banana. Inside a ripe pawpaw, the flesh will be yellow, soft, and mellow, resembling custard.

**STORAGE.** Pawpaws are very perishable. They respire more than most fruits, and in the process can evolve quite a bit of moisture, heat, carbon dioxide, and ethylene (the fruit-ripening hormone). When perfectly ripe, pawpaws will last for only about two days at room temperature. Refrigerated at 40-45F, the same fruits may last a week. If the fruits are not quite ripe, they may be refrigerated for about two weeks and then ripened at room temperature for several days. Storing pawpaws at less than 40F is not recommended since it often changes the flavor, producing caramel-like notes.

**QUALITY.** Quality pawpaws compare favorably to the best pears, peaches, and mangos of the world. They can vary considerably in size, depending on the cultivar, and the number of seeds in each fruit, but should ordinarily weigh between 5 ounces and 1 pound. They should appear plump and round in shape--the largest, plumpest pawpaws often resemble mangos. The flesh should be neither too soft or too firm: it should have a custardy texture that is smooth, melting, and luscious. The flavor should be sweet, fragrant, and complex, with a satisfying and lingering aftertaste.

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