

Carica papaya

Caricaceae

Tropical America

English: Pawpaw

Nyanja: Papayi

Ecology: A short-lived fruit tree grown in the tropics and in subtropical areas with a mild climate in Africa, Australia and North America. It is planted around homesteads throughout Zambia. Suitable soils are well drained and fertile. It has a shallow root system.

Uses: **Food** (fruit), **drink** (fruit), medicine (roots, leaves), meat tenderizing (leaves, fruit).

Description: A tree-like herb, 2–10 m, the soft fibrous trunk to 20 cm across, narrowing to a crown of leaves. **BARK:** pale grey, smooth, **well marked with leaf scars**. **LEAVES:** to 60 cm across, **deeply palmately lobed**, the **hollow stalks to 60 cm long**. **FLOWERS:** male trees, abundant **flowers on drooping stalks**, cream-yellow, about **2 cm long, tubular** and fragrant; female trees larger, few flowers beside leaves, **5 thick waxy petals, cream, about 5 cm long**, fragrant with prominent sticky stigma (sometimes male and female together on one tree). **FRUIT:** take about 3 months to mature, oblong to spherical, **7–50 cm long and 15 cm across, thin skin, green to orange**. The sweet edible flesh bears many black seeds on the inside leaving the centre hollow.

Propagation: Seedlings, direct sowing at site; grows easily from seed.

Seed: No. of seed per kg: 20,000. Collected from ripe fruit.

treatment: Dry in air.

storage: Store under cool and dry conditions. Viability is up to 3 years.

Management: Germination takes 1–4 weeks. Weeding is essential as pawpaw is sensitive to root damage. In plantations, space plants 2–4 m apart and have 1 male tree for every 25 female trees.

Remarks: Meat can be tenderized by wrapping it in pawpaw leaves. Trees do well for 3–4 years then yield falls, so plant every 4 years on a fresh site. The tree is attacked by several weevils, bugs, etc. Leaves are used to treat whooping cough and roots to treat sexually transmitted diseases.

