

Anyone Growing Paw Paws?

by Al Chomica

The Paw Paw is a beautiful tropical tree that bears large fruit and is native to the SE United States. Resembling a mango, they are grown commercially in New Zealand and may well be one of the best tasting fruits in the world. In 2011 we planted two Paw Paw trees on our property in Nanoose Bay and hoped for the best. Paw Paws require a specific cross-pollinator to set fruit and although we bought the correct two, in the second year a contractor dropped a ladder on the head of one tree and snapped it in half, slowing down its rate of growth. It is five years old and has never flowered whereas the other tree flowered in its third year.

Paw Paws are a strange plant in that the flowers have very thick, ceramic-like petals that taste sweet and are very crunchy. They smell like rotting meat which would mean they not only require pollen from a compatible tree but that a different pollinator like a fly or beetle may be required to perform the act of fertilizing flowers. No one seems to know, although a self-fertile tree in Duncan was observed being pollinated by a Comma Butterfly in 2015 and the tree produced 60 fruits.



In 2016, my big tree produced over 100 flowers but since I had no cross-pollinator I didn't expect much. I placed various shellfish remains under the tree to attract flies and one day noticed some pollen shaking out of a flower where two flies were scrapping. Low and behold, many of the flowers formed miniature fruits although only three of the flowers became self-fertile and matured.

Inside the fruit are large seeds in a pulp. The fruit smells like strawberries, tastes just like a great mango and leaves one with a taste of banana! This is a true plant of worth and it grows in our food forest.

