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THE GRAPEVINE

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PAWPAW TREES: A NATIVE FRUIT

Even though pawpaw is native to eastern Kansas, many people in the state have never eaten one. Fruits resemble fat bananas and are generally up to 6 inches long and as much as 3 inches wide. The taste is unique and is difficult to describe but is often said to resemble bananas or pineapple and has a texture somewhat like custard. They are rarely grown commercially because they are difficult to ship and do not store well. Ripe fruit will only hold 2 to 3 days at room temperature and up to a week under refrigeration. Pawpaw prefers a well-drained, moderately acid (pH 5.5 to 7.0), moist soil and high organic matter content. Organic mulch is also recommended. Irrigation will be helpful to necessary depending on what part of Kansas they are grown. In the wild, the pawpaw is an understory tree and may do better with partial shade, especially during the first 2 to 3 years. Protection from high winds is also advisable due to the 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. These trees are pollinated by insects other than bees such as beetles and flies and must be planted close together. Trees should be no further than 30 feet apart in order to insure good pollination.

The soil for planting should be prepared in advance of receiving the trees. Amend the soil with organic matter in the area where the trees will be planted. Do not amend just the soil from the planting hole, especially if the soil is heavy and has high clay content. If you do, you have essentially made a pot that will hold water and may drown the tree. Rather, add organic matter to the area in which the tree will be planted before digging the planting hole; at least a 10- by 10-foot square. You may want to treat the entire area where your trees will be planted. Add 2 inches of organic matter to the surface of the soil and then till in. 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. Keep newly planted trees well watered. The soil should be moist but not waterlogged. Keep the planting area completely free of weeds or any other type of vegetation within 3 feet of the trees. Mulching is recommended. There has been a significant amount of work done on pawpaw by Kentucky State University. You can reach their pawpaw site at ><http://www.pawpaw.kysu.edu/>< Information on growing pawpaws is available from Peterson Pawpaws at ><http://www.petersonpawpaws.com/>< Neil Peterson's pawpaws are the result of over 25 years of research and have been widely tested. Though Neil no longer sells his varieties directly, he does list a number of nurseries that carry them. The Kansas Forest Service (www.kansasforests.org) has seedling trees available for sale though I would recommend getting named varieties instead if you wish to plant only a few trees. The fruit from named varieties will be of a higher quality than that from a seedling tree. Named variety pawpaws are available from Stark Brothers (www.starkbros.com). The University of Missouri has a couple of different pawpaw cultivar trials. You can find results from one of these trials at ><http://www.centerforagroforestry.org/pubs/pawpaws.pdf><

Bird Feeding

Severe winter weather is not only hard on people but can be a life and death struggle for birds. Though birds also require water and shelter, food is often the resource most lacking during cold weather. Many different bird food mixes are available because various species often prefer different grains. However, there is one seed that has more universal appeal than any other: black oil sunflower. If you are new to the bird-feeding game, make sure there is a high percentage of this seed in your mix. White proso millet is second in popularity and is the favorite of dark-eyed juncos and other sparrows as well as the red-winged blackbird. As you become more interested in bird feeding, you may want to use more than one feeder to attract specific species of birds. Following is a list of bird species with the grains they prefer.

- Cardinal, evening grosbeak and most finch species - sunflower seeds, all types.
- Rufous-sided towhee - white proso millet.
- Dark-eyed junco - white and red proso millet, canary seed, fine cracked corn.
- Many sparrow species - white and red proso millet.
- Bluejay - peanut kernels and sunflower seeds of all types.
- Chickadee and tufted titmouse - peanut kernels, oil and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-breasted nuthatch - oil (black) and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Brown thrasher - hulled and black-striped sunflower seeds.
- Red-winged blackbird - white and red proso millet plus German (golden) millet
- Mourning dove - oil sunflower seeds, white and red proso plus German (golden)millet.

Extended cold periods can also make water unavailable. A heated birdbath can be a tremendous draw for birds during times when all other water is frozen. Energy use is usually less than what most people expect IF the heater has a built-in thermostat. If you would like more information, Chuck Otte, Agriculture Extension Agent for Geary County has a series of backyard birding guides at <http://gearycountyextension.com/NRMW.htm>.

Fruit Trees and Frost

If you are considering purchasing fruit trees this spring, there are certain factors that should be considered for some of our fruit tree species. Spring in Kansas is often unsettled with apricot and peach tree flowers being very vulnerable to late frosts that can kill fruit buds. Of course, the tree itself will be fine but there will be no to little fruit for that year. Other species of trees can also be affected but apricots and peaches are by far the most sensitive. Also, the closer a tree is to full bloom, the more sensitive it becomes to frost. Apricots are more likely to have frost kill flowers than peaches because they bloom a bit earlier. Though there are late-blooming apricot varieties, the differences between full bloom on early and late-blooming varieties appears to be slight. Research at Virginia Tech in the 90's showed a maximum of a 4-day difference between early and late varieties. However, in some years that may be all that is needed. The trees in the study that were considered late blooming included Hungarian Rose, Tilton and Harlayne. Peaches are next on the list for being likely to be caught by a late frost. With peaches, two characteristics become important when considering whether they will be damaged. Like apricots, bloom time is very important but fruit bud hardiness should also be considered. In this case, fruit bud hardiness refers to hardiness to late frosts rather than the ability to survive extreme low temperatures during the winter. Late bloomers included 'China Pearl', 'Encore', 'Intrepid', and 'Risingstar.' The 'Intrepid' cultivar also has shown excellent cold hardiness when in flower. So, are there other considerations when looking at possible frost damage? Location can be very important. Planting on a hill which allows cold air to drain to lower elevations can help. Also, a location in town will be more likely to have a warmer micro-climate than an exposed location. Some gardeners will add a heat source under a tree during cold nights if they are close to a building.