

Carica papaya: Papaya¹

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Introduction

Enormous, simple, lobed leaves combine with a single trunk and delicious fruit to make this a desirable plant for many landscapes. Flowers are produced along the trunk from the leaf axil. Flowers on male plants are more conspicuous and showy; female flowers are borne close to the stem and usually go unnoticed. Fruit are produced in the leaf axil close to the trunk. The trunk becomes thickened, occasionally growing to 12 inches in diameter. Although older plants can reach 20 feet tall or more, most reach only 15 feet before dying. Plants are short lived but grow quickly.

General Information

Scientific name: *Carica papaya*

Pronunciation: KAIR-rick-uh puh-PYE-yuh

Common name(s): papaya

Family: *Caricaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Mexico and Central America

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not assessed/
incomplete assessment

Uses: specimen; border; accent



Figure 1. Full Form—*Carica papaya*: Papaya

Description

Height: 10 to 15 feet

Spread: 5 to 7 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

1. This document is FPS106, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised December 2018. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: parted

Leaf shape: star-shaped

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 18 to 23 inches

Leaf color: green to olive green on top, paler green to whitish underneath

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

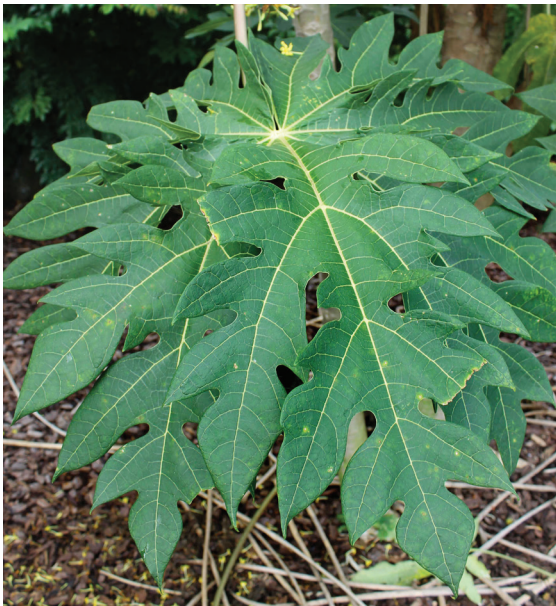


Figure 3. Leaf—*Carica papaya*: Papaya

Flower

Flower color: male—yellow; female and bisexual—yellow to white

Flower characteristic: male—emerges in branched clusters on ½–2” long stalks; female and bisexual—emerge singly or in clusters at leaf axils

Flowering: year-round



Figure 4. Flower—*Carica papaya*: Papaya

Fruit

Fruit shape: oblong or pear-shaped

Fruit length: 3 to 15 inches

Fruit cover: fleshy berry

Fruit color: turns from green to yellow orange when ripe

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption



Figure 5. Fruit—*Carica papaya*: Papaya

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: not particularly showy; usually with one stem/trunk

Bark: light brown to light green, smooth, with thin horizontal ridges from previous years' leaf scars

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick



Figure 6. Bark—*Carica papaya*: Papaya
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay; well-drained to occasionally wet

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

Most people would plant papaya for its fruit, but it can make a wonderful, coarse, accent plant in many landscapes. The huge leaves lend a texture that is unmatched by even the most tropical plants. In addition to producing delicious fruit, it adds interest to a shrub border or backyard landscape.

Plant in the full sun for fastest growth and best fruit production. Supply the plant with uniform moisture in the root zone throughout its life, and do not plant in a salty

environment. Papaya has naturalized in parts of south Florida as seeds germinate readily.

Pests and Diseases

The papaya whitefly can infest papaya.

Reference

Koeser, A.K., Friedman, M.H., Hasing, G., Finley, H., Schelb, J. 2017. Trees: South Florida and the Keys. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.