



# OPGA Educational Publication

## Improving Native North American Pawpaw Patches

Ron Powell, PhD

OPGA web site: [Ohiopawpaw.com](http://Ohiopawpaw.com)

OPGA discussion group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ohiopawpaw/>

The North American pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*, is North America's largest native fruit and Ohio's official Native Fruit. N. A. pawpaws contain many essential amino acids, minerals, good fats, and vitamins. The N. A. pawpaw is an extremely versatile fruit and can be eaten fresh, used to make wines, beer, brandy, a fat substitute in cooking and baking, and can be used in the preparation of many recipes.

The demand for North American pawpaw fruit has been increasing due to the educational efforts of Kentucky State University and the Ohio Pawpaw Growers Association. Although many excellent N. A. pawpaw selections have been introduced, the availability of these superior plants to the general public are limited and, thus, have restricted the establishment of commercial orchards with superior trees.

There are numerous wild patches of North American pawpaws throughout Ohio and the eastern U. S. that offer an opportunity for the establishment of a N. A. pawpaw "wild" orchard in a short period of time. Wild N. A. pawpaw patches growing along the edge of woods, in forests, in fence rows, in old pastures, and in riparian zones should all be investigated as potential areas of orchard development.

There are at least three methods of improving "wild" North American pawpaw patches. No matter which method is chosen, the patches of N. A. pawpaws must be opened up to additional sunlight for improved fruit production. The three methods of improvement are: (1) grafting select cultivars onto the "wild" N. A. pawpaws, (2) planting N. A. pawpaw seedlings or selected grafted varieties in the "wild" patch, and (3) hand pollinate the "wild" patch of N. A. pawpaws.

**January – February – Early March:** Collect scion wood from superior trees. OPGA provides scion wood from superior North American pawpaw trees for members and has a handout on collecting and storing scion wood.

**March:** Prune back competition within the wild N. A. pawpaw patch. All trees shading the pawpaw patch should be selectively removed or pruned as well as other invasive species.

**April:** As the flowers begin to open, observe the flowering patterns of the N. A. pawpaw trees. This is also a good time to collect pollen from your superior trees for use in hand pollination. Fertilization during the growing season is also helpful in increasing production.

**May:** Time to start grafting scion wood onto the wild N. A. pawpaw rootstock. OPGA provides grafting training and publishes a brochure on grafting. If it is a dry spring, you may want to water or wait until after a substantial rain to improve your grafting success.

**June:** Time to check your grafts. Depending on the type of graft, may need to prune the tree to direct the tree's energy into the new graft.

**July:** Be sure to weed around your N. A. pawpaw plants since they do not like competition from weeds. The N. A. pawpaws need a good moisture supply to produce quality fruit and irrigation may be beneficial if insufficient rain.

**August – September – early October:** Fruit may begin to ripen in late August and it is an ideal time to observe the fruit set of N. A. pawpaws. This will give you a good idea if the patches are worthwhile visiting during the harvest season. Harvest the fruit and sample fruit from specific trees to determine quality and collect other important data on the fruit. Select your favorite fruit and tag the trees.

**October:** Harvesting should be completed in early October. North American pawpaw seed should be cleaned and stored. Be sure to read the OPGA's handout on "How to handle N. A. pawpaw seed."

### **November – December:**

A good time to clear brush, mulch the N. A. pawpaw trees, and locate new N. A. pawpaw patches.