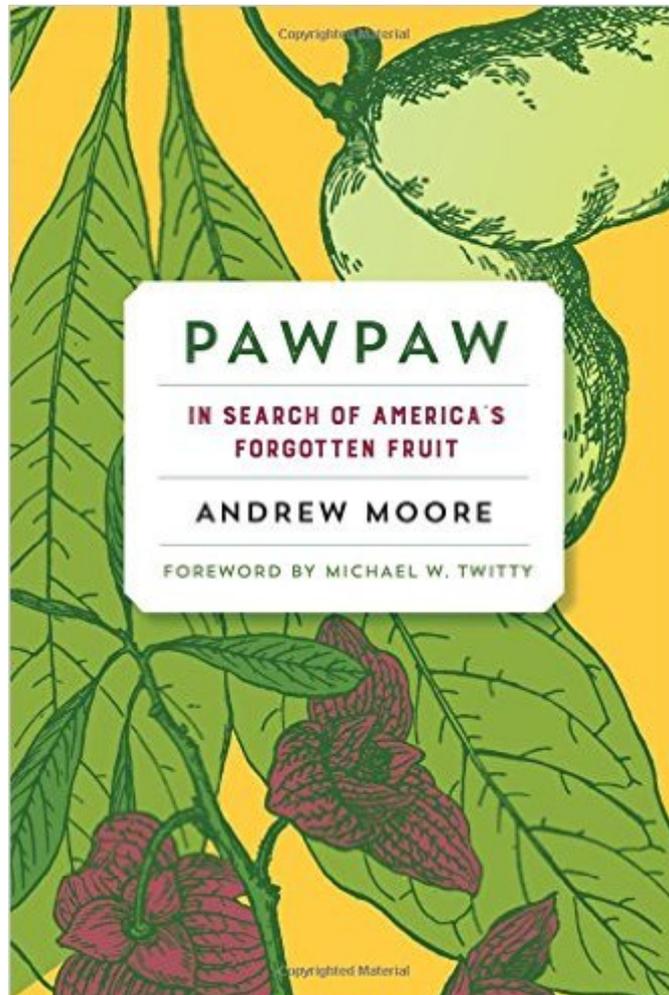


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# Pawpaw: In Search Of America's Forgotten Fruit



## Synopsis

The largest edible fruit native to the United States tastes like a cross between a banana and a mango. It grows wild in twenty-six states, gracing Eastern forests each fall with sweet-smelling, tropical-flavored abundance. Historically, it fed and sustained Native Americans and European explorers, presidents, and enslaved African Americans, inspiring folk songs, poetry, and scores of place names from Georgia to Illinois. Its trees are an organic grower's dream, requiring no pesticides or herbicides to thrive, and containing compounds that are among the most potent anticancer agents yet discovered. So why have so few people heard of the pawpaw, much less tasted one? In *Pawpaw*—a 2016 James Beard Foundation Award nominee in the Writing & Literature category—author Andrew Moore explores the past, present, and future of this unique fruit, traveling from the Ozarks to Monticello; canoeing the lower Mississippi in search of wild fruit; drinking pawpaw beer in Durham, North Carolina; tracking down lost cultivars in Appalachian hollers; and helping out during harvest season in a Maryland orchard. Along the way, he gathers pawpaw lore and knowledge not only from the plant breeders and horticulturists working to bring pawpaws into the mainstream (including Neal Peterson, known in pawpaw circles as the fruit's own "Johnny Pawpawseed"), but also regular folks who remember eating them in the woods as kids, but haven't had one in over fifty years. As much as *Pawpaw* is a compendium of pawpaw knowledge, it also plumbs deeper questions about American foodways—how economic, biologic, and cultural forces combine, leading us to eat what we eat, and sometimes to ignore the incredible, delicious food growing all around us. If you haven't yet eaten a pawpaw, this book won't let you rest until you do.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Imagine the perfect fruit. It would be sweet, like a ripe banana, and have a rich, complex flavor, like a really ripe peach or mango. It would have a soft, custardy texture that meant you could eat it with a spoon, or mix it into ice cream. And it would grow everywhere- even in the temperate United States. You could walk through a park, and there would be plenty for the taking, hanging from trees within easy reach. Such a fruit does, or did exist: The pawpaw. There was a time when it was taken for granted by rural dwellers and even a lot of city folk. Some Southerners called it a "Kentucky banana." Settlers and Native Americans made it a regular part of their diet- the pawpaw contains a large amount of niacin, more than any other fruit, making it the perfect companion for that other Native American staple, niacin-poor corn. So what happened? Why aren't there pawpaws in every yard, and every grocery store and fruit market? Why aren't we buying canned pawpaw pie filling and eating pawpaw pies? Author Andrew Moore asked himself these questions, and set out to answer them. Turns out that while pawpaws still grow wild in many places, cultivating them for market isn't as easy as it is with modern fruit cultivars. For one thing, pawpaw don't ripen all at once, even pawpaws on the same branch, and you can't tell if they're ripe by looking at them. You have to squeeze them, each and every one. Pick an unripe pawpaw, and unlike bananas or peaches or plums or other fruits, it'll never ripen. Wait just a little too long, and it'll fall by itself to the ground and get eaten by insects or animals. Pick one in perfect condition, and you have maybe a few days to eat it before it passes peak ripeness. Transplanting pawpaws can be darn near impossible. They spread mainly by sending up shoots from the root system, so young trees taken from a patch of pawpaws lack enough of a developed root system to survive on their own. That system of reproductions means that they don't have to produce fruit to reproduce. Even if a tree in a stand of pawpaws produced by sending up shoots does blossom, it probably won't fruit; blossoms on one tree need to be fertilized by a different tree in order to fruit, and the trees in a stand produced from a common rootstock are all genetically identical clones. Even with all these difficulties, farmers, food scientists, and foragers are working hard at creating a modern pawpaw revival. The foragers are spreading the word about the fruit, and the agriculturalists are finding ways of growing and harvesting them. Grafting is being used to propagate trees without relying on seeds and shoots. Zingerman's Deli in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has come out with a Paw Paw Gelato. Moore's narrative of the history and the future of the pawpaw makes for enlightening and entertaining reading. He also touches on other fruits neglected by modern day Americans, like the persimmon (a personal

favorite!). Great reading for foodies, amateur naturalists, historians, and outdoors people alike.

We have been planting a lot of fruit trees over the past three years. I have a big garden and we are slowly starting a food forest as well. One of the trees that was recommended was a Pawpaw tree - also known as custard apples - and we have planted two. They are not producing fruit yet, and I've never even tasted a paw paw - but they sounded so good I wanted to plant some. This book is wonderful. It's full of both personal stories and research about pawpaws and even includes some recipes. It's informative and an interesting read as well. It also gives specifics about all the different varieties, which I especially appreciated as they can taste pretty different depending on the variety. If you are interested in growing fruit, having a food forest, or learning more about native American pawpaws, this book has a lot of great information. Highly recommended.

I've recently become interested in pawpaws, largely because I was amazed to find out that they are relatively common in my area of southern Michigan - and I've never seen one! I recently did some research on the cancer-alleviating properties of pawpaw extract and started looking for them locally. I didn't find any. That's why I was so pleased to be offered the chance to review the book, "Pawpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit", by Andrew Moore and Michael W. Twitty. I found the author's interest was similar to my own experience - he had little personal knowledge of 'North America's only tropical fruit' either. He, however, went on a multi-year pawpaw search throughout the tree's range. This book is the story of that journey. The book is very 'readable' and immensely interesting, with bits of history, Native American lore, folk tales and geography interspersed with descriptions of attempts to cultivate pawpaws commercially and the differences in the fruits found within regions. The pawpaw story is the story of the United States (pawpaws only grow in Canada in a certain region of southern Ontario). The fruits sustained Native American tribes, fed impoverished rural families during the Great Depression and even sustained the Lewis and Clark expedition when they ran out of provisions. The pawpaw lent its name to dozens of creeks, rivers, small towns and school districts. Every child probably learned the old nursery song, 'Pickin up pawpaws' but the average child has never experienced the sweet, custard-y taste of this naturally growing fruit. Because the pawpaw has a short shelf life and is hard to ship, it has never experienced the growth in commercial usage that other fruits such as bananas have. You will however, occasionally find pawpaws for sale at tiny roadside stores located at rural 'corners' throughout Appalachia. Early entries into 'farmers markets' found the fruits being sold for as much as \$10 pound. And nationally-known Zingermans Deli of Ann Arbor Michigan makes their own pawpaw gelato which is

a huge treat to those 'in the know'. Efforts to create viable commercial orchards are still underway and seedlings can be purchased for home planting: the tree itself seldom grows over 30 ft, likes limited shade and will even grow under black walnut trees. No spraying is necessary as most bugs don't like pawpaws. It is the only nursery tree to support the larvae of the Zebra Swallowtail butterfly (but they apparently don't eat much). Two varieties are necessary for cross-pollination. And certain strains grow best in specific areas. I still haven't tasted that first pawpaw . . . but I have located some seedlings in my nearby area and plan to get me a couple for the side yard. And although "Pawpaw: In Search of America's Forgotten Fruit" isn't an actual growing guide, it will certainly help me find the perfect stop here along the River Raisin! Great little book. If you like history, trees and organics, and want to learn about pawpaws, this is the place to start!

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