

Tropical America

- Common names: Eng: papaya, pawpaw; Swah: mpapai.
- Ecology: A short-lived tree grown throughout the tropics and in mild sub-tropical climates in Africa, Australia and North America. Introduced into villages and towns along the coast and in Zanzibar, pawpaw is well established and naturalized in all parts of Tanzania but performs better below 1,500 m. Suitable soils are well drained, fertile and slightly acid (pH 6.0-6.5). It has a shallow root system.
- Uses: Food (fruit), drink (fruit), medicine (roots), pickles, jam (fruit), meat tenderizing (leaves, fruit).
- Description: A tree-like herb, 2-10 m, the trunk about 20 cm across narrowing to a crown of leaves. Stem suckers often develop but branching only when the terminal bud is damaged. The trunk contains soft fibrous wood. BARK: pale grey, smooth, well marked with leaf scars. LEAVES: up to 60 cm across, deeply palmately lobed, the hollow stalks to 60 cm long. FLOWERS: male trees, abundant flowers on drooping stalks, cream-yellow, about 2 cm long, tubular, and fragrant; female trees larger, few flowers beside leaves, 5 thick waxy petals, cream, about 5 cm long, fragrant with prominent sticky stigma (sometimes male and female together on one tree). FRUIT: in Tanzania, about 3 months to mature, oblong to spherical, 7-50 cm long and 15 cm across, thin skin, green to orange. The sweet edible flesh bears many black seed on the inside leaving the centre hollow.
- Propagation: Seedlings, direct sowing.
- Seed info.: No. of seed per kg: 20,000. Collected from ripe fruit, treatment: air dried.
- storage: store in cool and dry conditions. Viability is up to 3 years.
- Management: Direct sowing is best for fruit production—grows easily from seed. Sow 5-30 seeds; germination takes 1-4 weeks. Weeding is essential as pawpaw is sensitive to road damage. In plantations, space plants 2-4 m apart and have 1 male tree for every 25-100 female trees.
- Remarks: Pawpaw is recommended for all parts of Tanzania below 1,500 m. Large-scale planting is possible in the coastal zones with higher rainfall and in the coral-rag area of Zanzibar. Meat can be tenderized by wrapping it in pawpaw leaves. Trees do well for 3-4 years then yield falls, so plant every 4 years on a fresh site. The tree is attacked by several weevils, bugs, etc.

