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Papaw

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Papaws, or papayas as they are known in most tropical countries, have been available in Perth shops for many years, but have never achieved great popularity.

Properly ripened, they make a tasty dessert similar in some respects to rock melon.

Many people who have enjoyed papaw in the tropics are disappointed with the flavour and texture of the fruit on sale in the Perth metropolitan area.

The lack of flavour mostly results from picking the fruit before it is fully ripe so that it can be transported without breaking down. This is necessary because Western Australia’s commercial papaw plantings are in the State’s tropical and sub-tropical North.

Tree-ripened fruit, as served in tropical countries, usually has much more flavour.
Commercial potential
Most of Western Australia's papaws are grown in Carnarvon, though plantings also have been developed in the Pilbara and Kimberley districts.

At Carnarvon, some banana and vegetable growers produce papaws as a small side-line. To date, they have been unable to match bananas for productivity or income.

Any commercial development with papaws in the future will hinge on the presentation of a more acceptable product on the Perth metropolitan market.

Some Perth gardeners have grown papaws, but with mixed success. They require a warm, sheltered, frost-free site, preferably with a northerly aspect.

Growth details
The papaw (Carica papaya) originated in tropical America.

It is a hollow stemmed, fast-growing tree, usually from two to four metres tall with large bright green denticulate leaves. The leaves are attached by long stems, direct to the trunk.

The plant thrives best in year-round warm conditions.

The fruit is similar to the rock melon in size, but its skin is smooth, thin and attractive orange-yellow when ripe.

Many varieties of papaw are mono-sexual... that is, plants are either only male or female. Other varieties are bi-sexual, so that every plant produces fruit.

Mono-sexual types are best suited to the Perth climate because they set more fruit in cool conditions.

Under ideal conditions a papaw plant can produce ripe fruit within a year of planting, and can continue to produce more than 100 fruits a year. Such plants usually become tall and unmanageable after about three years of production.

Papaws are very susceptible to root nematodes, usually a problem in home gardens in the metropolitan area.

Gardeners in Perth and the South-West would gain better results if they grew their own plants from seed. Carnarvon-grown papaws are mostly of the mono-sexual type so the seed saved from them will produce only male or female plants.
MOUNTAIN PAPAW

Mountain papaws originated in Colombia and Ecuador, where they grow at an altitude of about 2500 metres above sea level.

Seed imported into Western Australia in the 1970s was planted in a number of locations throughout the South-West. Some of these thrived and fruited well.

The plant is similar to that of the common papaw but is more compact. Fruit forms in the same way, but is little bigger than a large duck egg. Its flavour is attractive, but it is too small to be a commercial prospect.

It could be a useful addition to home gardens, particularly in the South-West.

BABACO

Babacos also originated in the highlands of Ecuador and are closely related to common papaws.

Some fruit has been imported recently from New Zealand and has appeared in Perth shops. The fruits are large and fleshy, about 30 centimetres long and 10 centimetres in diameter. They are five-sided in cross section. When ripe they are green to yellow and average about one kilogram.

Again, the plant is similar to that of other papaws.

Babaco fruit sets without pollination, and carries little or no seed. The plant must be propagated by tissue culture or with sections of stem.

It is possible that babacos could grow well in favoured locations in Western Australia's South-West.