

# *Carica papaya*: Papaya<sup>1</sup>

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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

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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

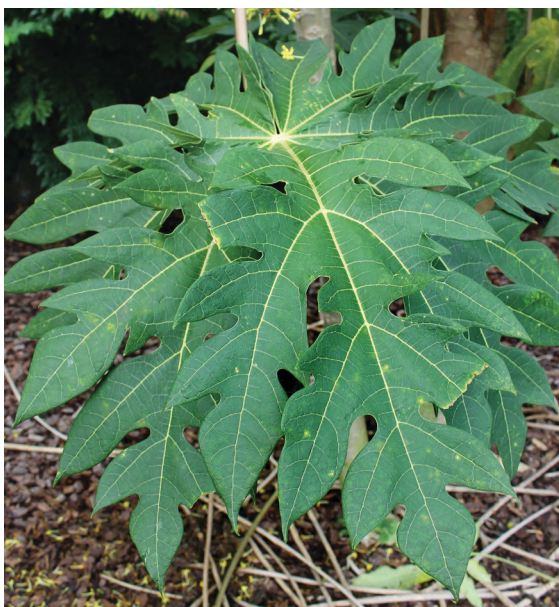


Figure 3. Leaf—*Carica papaya*: Papaya

## 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.