

# South Pacific Commission

Community Health  
Services

SOUTH  
PACIFIC  
FOODS

Leaflet  
Revised 1992

2



## Pawpaw

### A food for everyone

Pawpaws, also known as papaya, maoli, tebaia, esi, vininita, paipai, es, olesi, lesi, popo, mummy apple and many other names, grow on almost every island in the Pacific. The fruit of the pawpaw is one of the tastiest and healthiest foods found in the islands. People eat pawpaw almost every day and it is a popular breakfast fruit in many countries.

But in some islands, people let the pawpaw rot, leave it for the birds, or feed it to the pigs. These people are not making full use of the good taste and food value of the pawpaw. Pawpaw is not just a food for animals — people should enjoy it too, either ripe as a fruit or green as a vegetable.



### The pawpaw tree...

The pawpaw tree has the scientific name *Carica papaya*. There are three kinds of pawpaw trees.



Female and hermaphrodite trees bear fruits at the base of their crowns.

**Female** pawpaw trees have fruit and flowers that grow on short stalks at the base of the leaves. To bear fruit, female trees need pollen from nearby male trees.

**Male** pawpaw trees have flowers that grow on long hanging stalks. Although male trees may sometimes bear fruit, it is not good to eat. Usually one male tree is planted for every eight to ten female trees.

**Hermaphrodite** pawpaw trees have both male and female flowers. The male flowers supply the pollen the female flowers need to produce fruit, so a single tree can bear fruit alone.

Pawpaws are usually grown from seeds. The seeds can either be sown in a nursery, then transplanted, or planted directly in the soil. If

planted directly, they should be spaced 6—8 feet apart and then thinned to ensure healthy growth.

### ... and its delicious fruit

Less than a year after planting, pawpaw trees begin bearing fruit. When the fruit turns yellow, it is ripe. The ripe fruit is very soft and must be handled carefully so that the skin will not bruise.

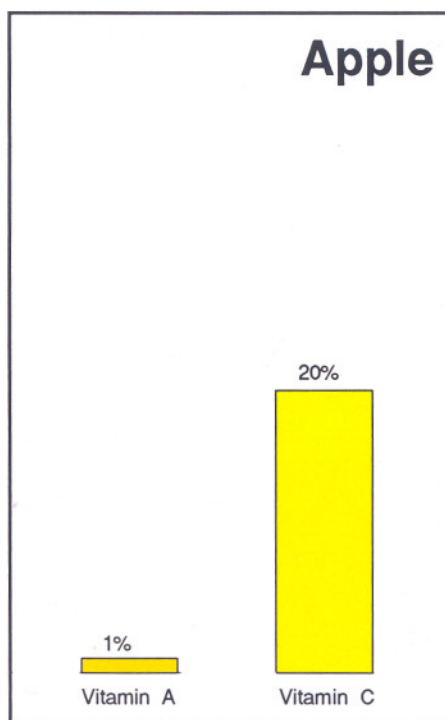
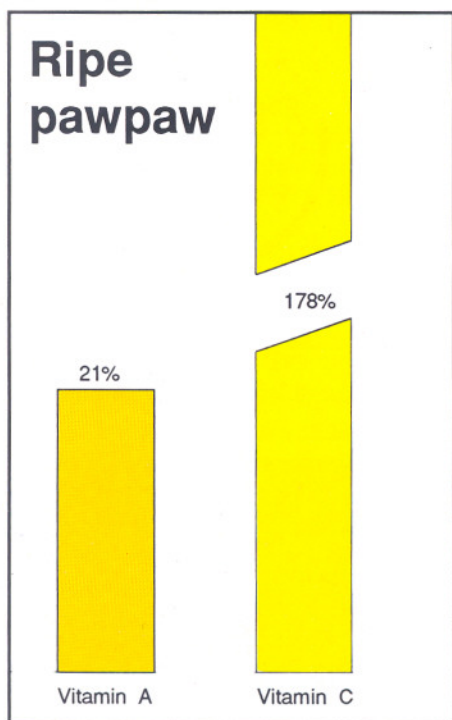
When the ripe pawpaw is picked, the stalks should be cut close to the trunk of the tree. If this is not done, the other fruits still on the tree may be hurt by the sharp end of the stalk.

Every island home should have at least one pawpaw tree growing nearby. A family can enjoy 15 to 30

LIBRARY

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION





Half a slice (approximately 1/4 cup) of ripe pawpaw supplies 21% of the Vitamin A and 178% of the Vitamin C needed by a child (1—10 yrs.) each day. One small apple supplies only 1% of the Vitamin A and 20% of the Vitamin C needed.

pawpaw fruit a year from a fully grown tree. The shape, size, colour and flavour vary between varieties, but all are tasty and full of vitamins.

### An excellent source of vitamins

Ripe pawpaw contains plenty of **Vitamin A**, which is needed for proper growth, healthy eyes and protection from disease. Green pawpaws do not contain as much Vitamin A.

Pawpaw is also a good source of **Vitamin C**, which keeps the body tissues strong, helps the body use iron and assists chemical actions in the body.

The amount of Vitamin C in pawpaw increases as the fruit ripens. A pawpaw that still has green skin has only 60 to 70 per cent of the Vitamin C that a fully ripe one has.

Pawpaw contains more Vitamin A and Vitamin C than many other fruits, especially imported fruits. As the bar graph shows, a young child would have to eat about 10 apples to get as much Vitamin C as she or he can get from half a slice of pawpaw. So why buy expensive imported apples when you can eat delicious, tasty and readily available pawpaw instead?

### A fruit for all the family

Because pawpaw is high in vitamins and easy to digest, it is an excellent food for babies. When babies are 4—6 months old, they need to be given soft foods as well as breast milk. Pawpaw juice or mashed ripe pawpaw makes an excellent first food for babies.

**To make pawpaw juice:** press a little ripe pawpaw flesh through a clean wire strainer or a clean cloth, then add some cooled boiled water. Do not add sugar.

As children grow up, they should continue to eat lots of pawpaw. This fruit is much healthier for children than sweets or snacks bought at the store.

Pawpaw is also good for sick people, especially those whose stomachs get upset when they eat meat, chicken or eggs. Eating pawpaw with these foods sometimes makes them easier to digest.

But pawpaw is not only for babies, children, and sick people. Plain, or with a little lemon or lime juice, a slice of pawpaw is a good way for anyone to start the day. A slice of pawpaw has more Vitamin C than an adult needs in one day. Eating just bread, rice or hard biscuits in the morning does not provide any Vitamin C.

### A special ingredient

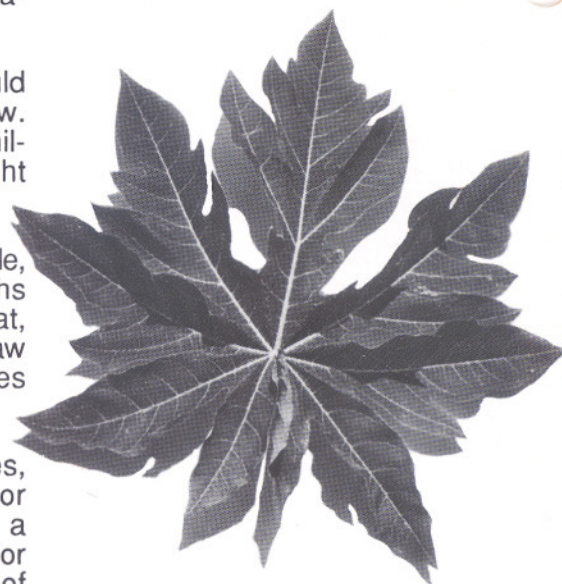
The pawpaw is not only delicious and full of vitamins and flavour, but also has a special useful substance. The leaves and green fruit of the pawpaw tree contain a chemical called **papain**. Papain can be used in some special ways. For example:

**To make meat or octopus tender,** wrap in pawpaw leaves and leave overnight, or rub the juice of the green pawpaw into the meat or octopus. (To get the juice, score or cut the skin of a green pawpaw with a knife and let the juice drip onto a clean plate.) Papain is also used commercially for the manufacture of meat tenderizers.

**To treat insect stings,** rub with the juice of a green pawpaw to lessen the pain. But be careful! Pawpaw juice in the eye will hurt.

**To kill intestinal worms** or as a treatment for indigestion, mix three to four teaspoons of the milky juice of the green pawpaw with the same amount of honey, stir into a cup of hot water, and drink.

**To wash clothes and remove stains,** use young pawpaw leaves instead of soap. First rub clothes with crushed pawpaw leaves, then rub the clothes against each other during washing.



**Pawpaw leaves contain papain, a chemical with many uses.**



## Preparation and preservation

The most nutritious way of eating pawpaw is to eat it fresh when it is ripe. Green fruit can be used in salads. It can also be cooked to give variety to meals. Firm ripe or green pawpaw is good baked or stewed with other foods.

Pawpaw should never be cooked longer than necessary. Important vitamins can be lost by over-cooking. Covering the pot with a lid while cooking helps to save the vitamins.

Drying is a good way to preserve pawpaw. **To dry pawpaw:** cut fresh ripe pawpaw into cubes. Lay the cubes on clean trays or clean banana leaves and leave them in the sun for two or three days. Turn the pawpaw cubes over two or three times a day so that they dry evenly. If flies are a problem, cover the pawpaw with netting. A solar drier can be used to dry pawpaw more quickly.

Dried pawpaw will keep for several months when stored in a tightly sealed jar, tin or plastic bag. It makes an excellent snack for children.

### Pawpaw—coconut pudding

*Six servings:*

- 1½ cups pawpaw pulp
- 7 tablespoons cornflour or cassava flour
- 1½ cups thin coconut cream (from 1 coconut plus water)

1. To prepare the pawpaw pulp, peel the pawpaw and remove the seeds. Chop the pawpaw into small pieces, press it through a medium sieve or mash with a fork, then measure.
2. Gradually stir in the cornflour or cassava flour.
3. Cook over a low heat, stirring all the time, until the mixture thickens.
4. Add coconut cream and cook 5—10 minutes. (When cool, the mixture should barely hold its shape; it should not be stiff enough to mould.)
5. Pour into a deep dish and chill, if possible.
6. Serve plain, or with coconut cream.

### Green pawpaw curry

*Four servings:*

- 2 medium-sized green pawpaws
- 2 tablespoons butter, margarine or dripping
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cloves crushed garlic (optional)
- 1 small piece grated ginger (optional)
- 2 green chillies
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 cup coconut cream
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup lemon juice
- Pepper

1. Melt the butter, margarine or dripping.
2. Fry the onion, garlic and ginger for 3 minutes.
3. Add the chillies and curry powder and cook for about 5 minutes, until the mixture is a rich golden brown colour.
4. Slowly stir in the coconut cream and water.
5. Wash and peel the pawpaw, remove the seeds and chop into cubes. Add the pawpaw cubes to the curry sauce. Cook for about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add lemon juice and pepper to taste.
6. Serve hot with cooked taro, sweet potato or breadfruit.

### Green pawpaw and fish soup

*Six servings:*

- 1 medium-sized fish
- 1 cup coconut cream (from 1 coconut)
- 2 cups coarsely grated green pawpaw
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 3 cups water

1. Clean fish and cut into pieces.
2. Bring 3 cups water to the boil, add fish, then boil for 10 minutes. Remove bones.
3. Add grated pawpaws and soy sauce, then cook until tender (about 10 minutes.)
4. Add coconut cream, stir once, and remove from heat.
5. Serve hot.

### Pawpaw and pineapple salad

*Six servings:*

- 2 cups diced ripe pawpaw
- 2 cups diced pineapple
- 6 tablespoons lemon juice

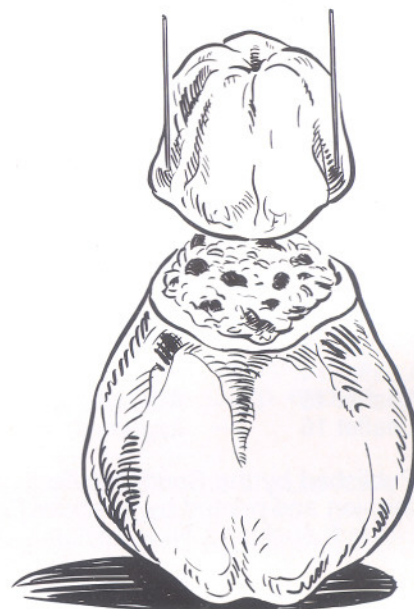
1. Mix together all the ingredients.
2. Leave for half an hour in a cool place, then serve with cooked fish or meat and some taro, breadfruit or sweet potato.

### Stuffed pawpaw

*Four servings:*

- 1 medium-sized half-ripe pawpaw
- ¾ cup cooked minced meat or any leftover meat
- ¾ cup cooked rice or leftover cooked root crops (chopped)
- 1 small onion
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- Oil

1. Cut stalk end off pawpaw and save. Scoop out seeds.
2. Finely chop onion and fry in 2 tablespoons of oil.
3. Put onion, cooked minced meat and cooked rice or root crops in a bowl, then add beaten egg, salt and pepper.
4. Mix ingredients well, then stuff into pawpaw. Attach the stalk end to the pawpaw, using a toothpick or the middle rib from a coconut leaf.
5. Brush with oil and bake at 180°C (350°F) until pawpaw is soft (45 minutes to one hour). Any type of oven can be used. The pawpaw can also be steamed.
6. Serve with boiled green leaves or salad, if desired.





## Pawpaw snacks

1 ripe pawpaw  
Cinnamon (optional)

1. Wash and peel the pawpaw and remove the seeds.
2. Slice thinly.
3. Spread out a clean plastic bag or a small tightly woven mat of coconut palm leaves.
4. Sprinkle cinnamon on top of pawpaws.
5. The slices of pawpaw must be as thin as possible so that they will dry quickly. If they are too thick they will not dry well, and later they may spoil.
6. Dry the pawpaw in the sun until the slices will come off the plastic or mat without sticking.
7. When dry, remove the pawpaw from the plastic or mat, and store in a clean glass jar.
8. Makes a very healthy and nutritious snack for children instead of expensive lollies bought from the store.

*Note:* This recipe can also be used for other fruits such as mango.



## Pawpaw salad

*Four servings:*

1 small half-ripe but firm pawpaw  
1 tablespoon coconut cream or vegetable oil  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
Pepper  
8 lettuce leaves

1. Peel skin from pawpaw and slice or grate the fruit thinly.
2. Rinse with clean fresh water and drain well.
3. Mix together the coconut cream or vegetable oil, lemon juice and a pinch of pepper.
4. Pour mixture over grated pawpaw and let stand for at least 10 minutes.
5. Serve on lettuce leaves.

## Pawpaw drink

*Four servings:*

2 cups ripe pawpaw pulp  
2 cups milk or thin coconut cream  
4 teaspoons lemon or lime juice

1. To prepare pawpaw pulp, peel the pawpaw and remove the seeds, chop it into small pieces, press it through a coarse sieve or mash with a fork, then measure.
2. Add the lemon juice and milk or thin coconut cream and mix well.
3. Serve immediately or, if possible, chill for a short time.



This leaflet is the second of a series devoted to the uses of local Pacific foods. Other leaflets available in this series are:

Leaflet 1	—	Taro
Leaflet 3	—	Mango
Leaflet 4	—	Guava
Leaflet 5	—	Cassava
Leaflet 6	—	Green leaves
Leaflet 7	—	Banana
Leaflet 8	—	Coconut
Leaflet 9	—	Breadfruit
Leaflet 10	—	Pineapple
Leaflet 11	—	Citrus fruits
Leaflet 12	—	Pumpkin
Leaflet 13	—	Sweet Potato
Leaflet 14	—	Yam
Leaflet 15	—	Nuts and seeds
Leaflet 16	—	Legumes

Published by the South Pacific Commission and printed by Stredder Print Limited, Auckland, New Zealand.

First printed 1980. Revised 1985.  
Reprinted 1986. Revised 1992.

This edition funded by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB).

© Copyright South Pacific Commission, 1992

Original text: English

South Pacific Commission Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Pawpaw : a food for everyone. — Rev. ed.  
(South Pacific foods leaflet ; 2)

1. Papaya 2. Cookery (Papaya)  
I. Series

641.34651

AACR2

ISBN 982-203-281-1

Copies of this and other leaflets in this series can be obtained from:

**Community Health Services (Nutrition Programme)**  
South Pacific Commission  
B.P. D5, Noumea Cedex  
New Caledonia

or from:

**Agriculture Library**  
South Pacific Commission  
Private Mail Bag  
Suva, Fiji