Carica papaya: Papaya

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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

Description
Height: 10 to 15 feet
Spread: 5 to 7 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse
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

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

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

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
environment. Papaya has naturalized in parts of south Florida as seeds germinate readily.

### Pests and Diseases
The papaya whitefly can infest papaya.

### Reference

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**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.