

Asimina triloba

[Synonyms : *Annona pendula*, *Annona triloba*, *Asimina campaniflora*, *Asimina conoidea*, *Asimina glabra*, *Asimina virginiana*, *Orchidocarpum arcetinum*, *Orchidocarpum arietinum*, *Porcelia triloba*, *Uvaria triloba*]

PAWPAW is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to the eastern United States it has small, dull lurid brownish-purple flowers with a debatably pleasant scent.

It is also known as American custard apple, American pawpaw, Asiminer, *Azimeno triloba* (Esperanto), Common pawpaw, Custard apple, False banana, Fetid shrub, Hoosier banana, Indian banana, *Papaño* (Esperanto), *Papavi* (Finnish), Papaw, Poor man's banana, Tall pawpaw, and Wild banana tree.

Warning – the seeds can cause a faintly persistent nausea. Handling the fruit can cause dermatitis on sensitive skin.

Triloba is made up of Latin *tri-* (three) and *lobi-* (lobe) components meaning 'three-lobed' with reference to the outer covering of the flower.

North American Cherokee Indians, and local fishermen among the settlers as well, used it to make cordage for stringing fish and making fish-nets.

John Bartram (1699-1777) was a farmer, who is also given the distinction of being the first American-born botanist, and it was he who sent the pawpaw to England in 1736.

The bottle-shaped brown fruit have not only provided food for birds and small mammals but also local North American Indian tribes (notably according to records the Cherokee and Iroquois) and in due time early settlers. Apart from eating the raw fruit, the Iroquois especially are said to have made small sun- or fire-dried cakes of the mashed fruit which were stored for future use – not only as hunting food but also as a flavouring ingredient in corn (*Zea*) bread or in sauces.

Today not only can the fruit be eaten raw but they can also be used for making bread, puddings or wine.

Pawpaws are easily recognised in a poem entitled *Armazindy* by one of America's favourite poets, James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916) who was born and lived in Indiana. He was affectionately christened the 'Hoosier Poet' because as in this example he often wrote so descriptively in dialect.

And sich pop-paws! – Lumps o' raw
Gold and green, – jes' oozy th' ough
With ripe yaller – like you've saw
Custard-pie with no crust to

Recent research in North American universities has shown that the bark contains a natural pesticide.

Medicinally, the seeds have been used in an emetic, the bark has provided a tonic, and the leaves have been applied to ulcers and boils.