

MORE ON PAWPAWS

by

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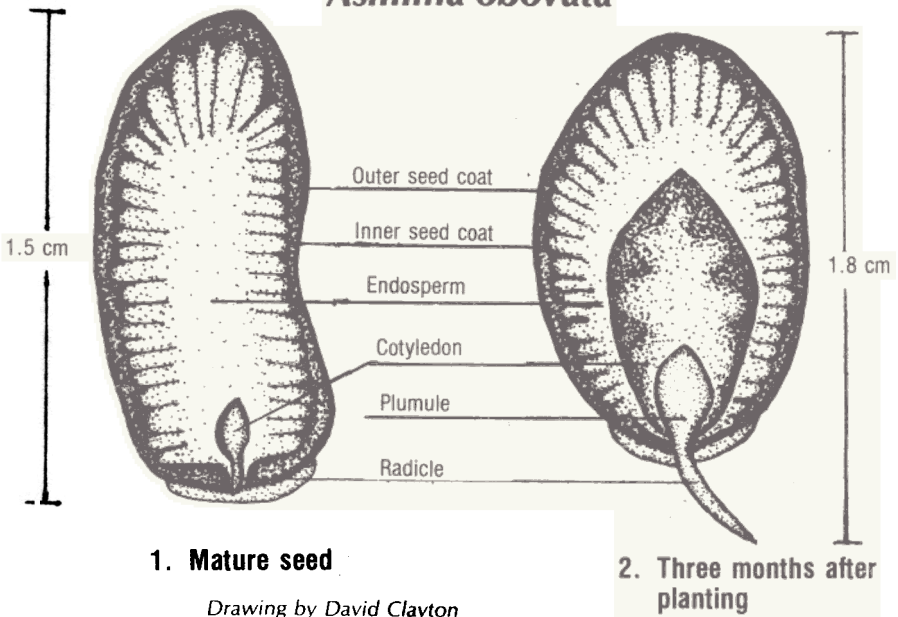
We're hoping that Marcy Bartlett's article in the May issue of **The Palmetto** dealing with the enigmatic Pawpaw stirred your interest, and that you'll want to learn more about these distant cousins of the Magnolias.

There are ten species of Pawpaws, eight in the genus *Asimina* and two rare ones in *Deeringothamnus*. These two genera are the only extratropical representatives of the family Annonaceae which includes such delicacies as the Cherimoya, Custard Apple, Sweetsop, and Soursop. All ten Pawpaws are native to Florida, although the tallest of these, *A. triloba*,

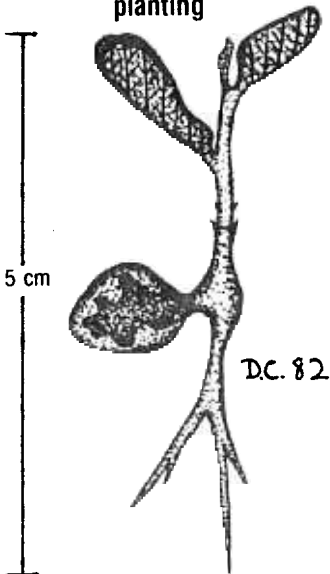
ranges as far north as Ontario, Canada, and as far west as Nebraska.

On the whole, Pawpaws produce few fruits because the flowers are protogynous (meaning that the stigmas are receptive before the pollen is shed, thus preventing selfing) and they rely on beetles to bring pollen from elsewhere to fertilize them. The beetles are probably attracted to the flowers because of their smell (sometimes pretty bad) and they are rewarded for their visit by the fleshy corrugated tissue at the base of the inner petals and later by the nutritious pollen. So if you want many fruits on your Pawpaws you'll have to hand-pollinate them. The fruits are large berries which turn yellowish when they

Asimina obovata



3. Four months after planting



mature in the summer. The flesh of some varieties of *A. triloba* are quite good to eat. Dr. Kral from Vanderbilt University, the expert on the Pawpaws, says that our natives ones taste like a sweet avocado!

The Pawpaws grow in a variety of habitats, including slash pine flatwoods, scrub, mesic hammock, and turkey oak sandhills communities. All the species produce a very stout and long tap root and it is almost impossible to transplant them because of this characteristic. It is easy to grow them from seed, but don't be impatient. It will take about three months for the seeds, which look like brown beans, to show any sign of life. Keep the soil damp but not wet. The illustrations give you an idea of the growth pattern of these fascinating Florida plants.