

## Papaw Pie or Parfait

Contributed by Peter Vogt, recipe from Euell Gibbons "Stalking the Wild Asparagus" (1962; David McKay, NY)

Papaw (or pawpaw) trees are common native understory trees in the Scientists Cliffs area—particularly on shaded ravine slopes and along woodland valley trails. They are known to prefer the better limed and "circum-neutral" soils west of our acid-soiled Coastal Plain, and probably for that reason are more common in limestone regions of the Midwest. It's possible that papaws 'like' our Calvert Cliffs locale due to the natural liming action of Miocene shell beds in our subsoil. The Papaw—not related to the papaya, except etymologically- is the only temperate member, a natural invader and adapter, if you like, of the otherwise tropical custard apple family—its entire leaf (no crenulations, spikes, or spines) is typical of tropical trees. Ripe papaw fruits are roughly potato shaped and sized, with a greenish, turning yellowish skin. The flavor is very "tropical"—not sour but almost aromatically sweet. They begin to fall from trees in later August and are generally gone by the end of September around here. *They're delicious when eaten directly*, but also make a good 'graham crust' type pie. It's the only "pie" I ever made, but made dozens during the mid and later 1970s. *I have also mixed papaw pulp into Vanilla ice cream.*

Unripe papaws will ripen indoors, but fruit flies love them dearly. The rich, tropical odor of papaws ripening indoors may turn off some people if they smell it day after day.

*To prepare the fruit, wash those collected from the ground, and peel off the thin skin. Then mash the yellowish pulp and strain through a sieve. The large, shiny dark brown seeds are inedible, but hard enough to make into necklaces, particularly if you add other hard seeds like persimmons or bitternut hickories.*

Here's the recipe:

*Mix ½ cup brown sugar, ½ teaspoon salt, and 1 envelope unflavored gelatin in a saucepan or pot. Stir into this 2/3 cup milk and 3 slightly beaten egg yolks. Heat this mixture while stirring constantly, until it comes to a boil. Then remove from stove and stir in 1 full cup of strained papaw pulp. Put this mixture into the reefer for 20-30 minutes, until it mounds slightly when spooned, but don't let it 'set' completely. A few minutes before you take it out, beat 3 egg whites until they form soft peaks, and gradually add ¼ cup white sugar, beating this until stiff peaks develop. At that point, fold the partly set papaw mixture into the beaten egg whites, and either pour into a 9" diameter graham cracker crumb crust or into parfait glasses. When papaws are abundant, you can make several pies—I have tried freezing them: they taste good later, particularly while still partly frozen.*