

Varieties

Papayas are generally grown from seed so there are few true varieties. The Hawaiian Solo, Blue Solo and more recent types are fairly uniform and are closest to varietal status. Consequently, most papayas are types rather than varieties, so fruiting characteristics are better considered in groups.

Papaya is polygamous, with three primary sex types: female, male and bisexual. There are some cases where plants produce more than one kind of flower at the same time. Bisexuals are usually preferred for home plantings, but most types available in Texas are male or female. Because sex determination prior to flowering is practically impossible, two to four seedling plants are grown together until flowering to assure females for fruit production and males for pollination.

Fruit types range from small to medium round and medium to large oblong. Flesh color is mostly yellow, although there are some orange to red types.

Female flowers are borne along the trunk and can be identified by that location and the presence of a miniature papaya fruit inside the base of the flower petals. Male flowers are borne in long sprays that originate along the trunk. Each spray is much-branched with inch-long, trumpet-shaped, male flowers. Bisexual types are practically identical to the females, but have male stamens surrounding the miniature fruit inside the flower petals.

Propagation and Planting

Most papayas are grown from seed because of the impracticality of vegetative propagation methods in nursery production. Seeds are extracted from fully ripe fruit, washed to remove gelatinous material and planted several per pot of soil or potting medium.

Germination is accomplished in approximately two weeks under full sunlight. The plants can be set out as soon as they are large enough (about 1 foot tall) to survive with minimal care. The pots of plants should be spaced 8 to 10 feet apart.

Papaya seedlings should begin flowering in five to six months, at which time they can be thinned to a single female or bisexual plant at each site. In the absence of bisexual plants, one male plant is needed for every eight to ten females.