

## **Culture**

Weed and grass control within 3 to 4 feet of the papaya is essential for optimum growth and fruiting. Cultivation for weed control should be quite shallow, as the papaya's roots are concentrated near the soil surface. The use of organic mulches is highly recommended.

Fertilizer at the rate of one-quarter pound of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) per plant should be applied monthly after planting, increasing to one half pound six months after establishment.

Irrigation should be applied to thoroughly wet the soil periodically as needed through the year. Avoid standing water following irrigation. A fluctuating irrigation regime may retard growth and cause poor fruit set.

Because papayas rapidly reach 10 to 15 feet or more, cold protection of the top is difficult. Protection of the lower portion of the trunk may permit the plant to regrow from sprouts in the event of freeze damage.

## **Production, Maturity and Use**

Well-tended papayas should produce fruit within a year of planting, with mature plants capable of producing 100 to 200 pounds of papayas per year. Fruit can be ripened off the plant after appearance of a yellow tinge at the apical end, but the fruit attains best quality if harvest is delayed until the fruit is completely yellow.

The most common use of papaya is fresh in slices or chunks and in fruit compotes. A thick juice can be prepared by blending diced papaya with a little water. Papaya can also be sliced and dried. Green papaya is sometimes cooked and eaten like squash. Papaya is a prime source of papain enzyme (meat tenderizer), so green fruit chunks and leaves can be wrapped around meat or fowl before cooking to enhance tenderness and flavor.

## **Disease and Insect Pests**

Root rots can cause rapid death of papaya plants. The only solution is to set new plants in a better location with better drainage or use raised beds. Watering must be done with care.

Virus diseases are quite common and uncontrollable. They normally cause vein-clearing and yellow mottling of the leaves. Other symptoms include distortion of leaf growth accompanied by stunting, poor set and the presence of various greasy-appearing or yellow rings on leaves and fruit. Infected plants should be removed and destroyed.