

Papaya/papaw planting notes for North Queensland

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These notes are based experience, and are not prescriptive. Use and adapt them as you see fit.

- Seedlings need to have a full rootball that hangs together for best transplanting; therefore, potting container size needs to be considered. I would suggest somewhere between 100 and 250ml.
- Sow seed in the container that you will transplant from
- Papaya have fairly delicate rootballs that are susceptible to soil diseases such as phytophthora
- Containers, trays and benches should be new, or cleaned and sterilised
- Keep containers and trays off the ground
- Use a bagged good quality seed-raising mix e.g. Searles or Yates. This can be lightened to improve the drainage by mixing medium perlite through the mix in a ratio of 1 part perlite to 2 parts seed-raising mix. Do not use any mixes containing soil, unless they've been sterilised
- Seedlings should take between 5 to 10 weeks, depending on pot size and weather conditions.
- Plan your seed raising and planting out to avoid cold weather under 10-12 C. and hot weather above 38 C.
- It's a good idea to have most of your ground work for planting done before you sow the seeds

Sowing the seed

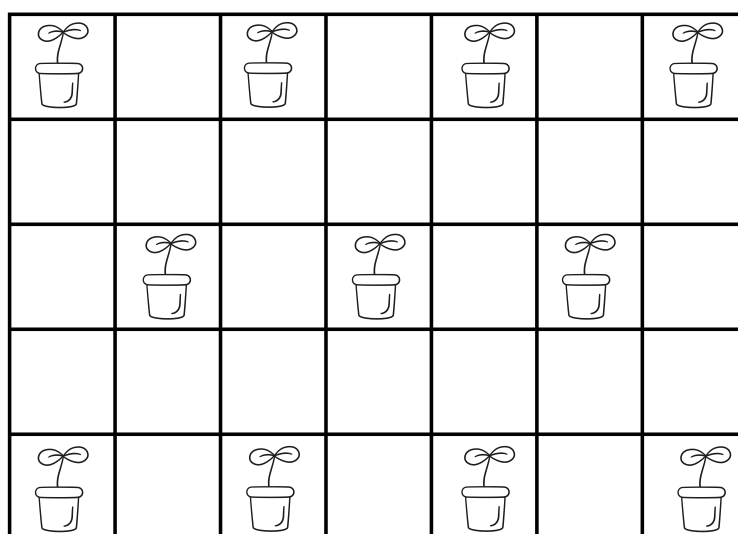
- Seed can sowed dry or wet

- Seed can be soaked in a standard seaweed solution overnight, or in a gibberellic acid solution (see separate Seed Note for details) to help germination if needed
- Fill planting containers with potting mix and water
- Make depressions about 1cm. deep in the top of the mix to take the number of seeds being planted in the container, using fingers or a tool. This keeps the seeds apart and lets them develop their own rootballs
- Sow the seed and cover with potting mix
- Water the seeds in, making sure all the mix is wet
- Keep in a place where the temperature is between 15° and 33°C, 25° is ideal. Containers can be placed in full sun if conditions are right. Watch out for mice and rats particularly, as they can dig up and eat the seed.
- Important - as soon as the first seedlings emerge, place containers into full sun. Seedlings usually take 10-20 days to emerge, depending on temperature.

Fertilising and Growing

- Monitor your seedlings regularly for pests and diseases, because if something can go wrong, it probably will.
- As soon as the seedlings have their first true leaves (ones with lobes), you can give them a spray or drench with a half-strength soluble chemical fertiliser (e.g. Thrive) or a full-strength organic one, such as Nitrosol / Powerfeed / fish emulsion. Do this once a week. Note that seaweed solutions are not fertilisers; they are tonics that can be applied at any time.
- Some potting mixes have added fertiliser in them and others do not. Monitor the appearance and condition of the seedlings and decide whether or not to apply a top-dressing fertiliser. Take advice and be careful to avoid burning the seedlings. It is usually best to apply fertilisers to moist potting mix and to water in afterwards.

- The potting mix needs to be kept moist but not overly wet, particularly in cool weather. Moisture levels should be checked daily, especially in hot and/or windy weather
- To control, treat or prevent damping-off disease (usually Pythium or Rhizoctonia) in the seedlings, apply a fungicide. I have used Ridomil liquid, Rovral Aquaflo and Previcur for this. Get advice if necessary.
- In cool, damp weather, watch out for brown spot on the leaves and treat with a leaf fungicide at the first sign. Seek advice.
- If growing in containers that can be spaced out, such as Native Tubes, wait until the plants are starting to crowd each other before spreading out. Do not let them get too high, as this will cause them to become spindly and weak
- With Native Tubes in 50mm galmesh benches, I would use the following spacing:



- When the seedlings have filled their containers with roots, they can be planted out. You can check this by knocking out some average-sized seedlings from their (moist) containers and seeing if the rootball holds together. If it doesn't, grow them on some more. Don't go only by the height of the seedlings.

Planting out

- Have your ground moist and weed-free
- Make sure the seedling potting mix is moist
- If possible, plant in the cool of the day, preferably in the afternoon
- Try to avoid damage to the rootballs as you plant, as this allows the entry of disease into the plants
- Seedlings should be planted at the same level as they were in their containers – do not cover the seedling stem with soil
- Water the seedlings in as soon as possible after planting, using enough water to settle the soil around the seedling roots. Do not rely on rainfall unless it is pouring down.
- It is recommended to use a soil fungicide such as Ridomil at planting, particularly during wet weather and/or if you are planting into ground with residual vegetation in it

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