The largest known Pawpaw tree in Michigan is located in the city of Paw Paw in Van Buren County in the southwest part of the Lower Peninsula. (The common name is usually spelled as one word, or sometimes hyphened as Paw-paw. The name of the city, by contrast, is officially two words, even though it is named for the tree.)

Description of the species: The Pawpaw belongs to the Annonaceae or Custard Apple family of the order Magnoliales. This is mostly a sub-tropical and tropical family. The only representative in Michigan is the Pawpaw. This tree can be recognized by its large, simple, alternate leaves with prominent veins and short thick petioles (see Fig. 1). The large (3–4 cm across) dark reddish-purple flowers appear in mid-spring and have 3 sepals, 6 petals, numerous stamens and 3–5 ovaries. The large edible fruit ripens in the fall. It is yellow-green at first, turning to brown or black later. The fruit is a large berry which may grow to be 5–12 cm long and 2–6 cm thick. The tree is infrequent in southern Michigan where it reaches the northern limits of its range. The fruits may be eaten raw and may be made into a variety of desserts. Some people find it to be quite sweet. Others find the taste to be rather revolting.

Location of Michigan’s Big Tree: Michigan’s largest Pawpaw tree is located in front of the Paw Paw Community Education Building at 600 E. Michigan Ave. in Paw Paw, MI. There are three trees in a cluster with the largest leaning slightly toward the road. The tree can be reached by taking exit 60 from Interstate 94 and going 0.7 miles north to Michigan Ave. at the center of Paw Paw. Turn right and go 0.4 mi. to 600 E. Michigan Avenue, the location of the Paw Paw Community Education Building, formerly the Paw Paw middle school. The GPS coordinates for this location are N42°13.077′ and W85°52.970′.

Description of Michigan’s Big Tree: The tree has a single, solid, healthy trunk. Its girth at 4/5′ above the ground was measured on 12 July 2003 as 39′′ (1 m). The tree was 37′ (11 m) high and had a crown spread of 34′ (10 m). The total points for this tree are 39 + 37 + ¼ × 34 = 85.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

If you would like to join in extending this series of articles by visiting and describing one or more of Michigan’s Big Trees, please contact Elwood B. Ehrle at woodyehrle@aol.com.
woodyehrle@aol.com for help with locations, specifications for taking measurements, and assistance with the manuscript. The Michigan Botanical Club encourages your involvement in this activity. Please remember to ask permission before entering private property. For the most recent list of Michigan’s Big Trees see Ehrle (2003).

FIGURE 1. Characteristics of the Pawpaw and location of Michigan’s Big Tree. The map is from Voss (1985). The asterisk on the map indicates the location of Michigan’s Big Tree. The drawings are from Barnes & Wagner (1981). 1. Winter twig, ×2½. 2. Leaf, ×½. 3. Flower ×½. 4. Fruit, berry, ×½. 5. Seed, ×½.

LITERATURE CITED