

Fairy Folk

at Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve at Saint Vincent College

Spring Water Fairies

March: Pawpaw Pixies

Clues to Find the Pawpaw Pixie's Door

- In summer, seek the neon green,
- In autumn, blinding gold.
- In spring, you'll see nary a leaf-
- But velvety petals unfold.
 - The mother tree, with all her young,
 - Like children gathered round.
 - The grove, it is her family-
 - Fruit offerings abound.
 - Follow the path,
 - Peek left and right,
 - 'til' our door you do see.
 - Don't touch, don't knock, don't peer inside,
 - Or once again we'll flee!

Be on the lookout
each month for more
fairies to arrive!

Folklore and Nature

Pawpaw Pixies are fascinating little creatures. Aside from their playful demeanor and bright green hair, they help make one of the most magical fruits in the world, the fragrant, sweet pawpaw.

Pawpaw trees are a Pennsylvania native species known as *Asimina triloba* and are the largest native fruiting species in North America. They have large tropical-esque bright green leaves that form a lush canopy, where they live in groves, often near water.

These trees are special because they evolved before modern bees, so honeybees and other native bees and pollinators are not attracted to their nectar. Instead, they rely on carrion beetles and flies, which are drawn to the foul smell of their flowers. Since there is not an abundance of these insects, the Pawpaw Pixies are eager helpers.

The pawpaw flowers are deep maroon with chartreuse centers that develop before the leaves appear in the spring and are a striking contrast to the bare tree branches. Like the insects, the pixies flit from male blooms to female blooms, softly blowing puffs of pollen grains onto their stigmas. All summer, clusters of fruit grow to the size of a small mango, eventually soften, and are ready to eat by September. Their sweet vanilla-mango-banana-custard-like flavored fruit is a lovely autumn delight!

The Pawpaw Pixies are swift and efficient in their tasks but love to play hide-and-seek in the dense understory of pawpaw groves. The tree bark sometimes has markings that look like eyes and the fairy folk know that there is much wisdom and mystery in

them. If you listen carefully, you may hear a snicker as a ripe pawpaw fruit drops from the tree. They are quite proud of their edible handiwork and eager for humans to taste them!



Winnie Palmer

Nature Reserve

At Saint Vincent College

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