

**Artist Statement for  
*Living Well: Plants that Nourish and Heal***

I have a history of loving nature -- *reflecting* nature -- in my photography, in my jewelry, and now, in my art. I am dedicated to a vision of art which illuminates the intricate nature of plants and other living things.

The theme of this exhibit involves *nature* and *nurture* -- a tension which has occupied many minds for a long time. I chose to illustrate our native pawpaw tree because it is an element of nature that provides nurture to both humans and a tremendous variety of wildlife.

The pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is a tropical tree growing in temperate North America. It produces our largest indigenous fruit and a delicious food that rarely appears on anyone's plate or menu. The fruits are always a surprise to folks who encounter them for the first time. To most North Americans, they are something that you pick up and put in your pocket because of a song we all learn as children but don't understand. The important thing is that this tree occurs in many of the places we walk, and all we have to do is LOOK to see it.

In the wild, the pawpaw fruit is consumed by turkeys and other birds, raccoons, opossums, foxes, black bears, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, voles... the list is long. Since the Native Americans, humans have cultivated the plant and eaten the fruit in both raw and cooked forms. There are purported medicinal benefits of various parts of this plant, and even clinical tests currently being conducted on a possible anti-cancer drug.

The pawpaw has been with us so long that a beautiful native butterfly, the zebra swallowtail (*Protographium Marcellus*), has evolved along with it, depending on it as the exclusive food source for its caterpillars. Our Mid-Atlantic climate allows for two generations of these beauties per year. In early spring, butterflies are emerging from the overwintered chrysalises and laying their eggs singly and primarily on the pawpaw's tender terminal leaves. By the time the pawpaw's maroon flowers appear, the caterpillars from those eggs are already consuming the leaves -- usually feeding at night and hiding from predators in the leaf litter in daylight. By the time the pawpaw produces its banana-like fruit in the fall, those caterpillars will have feasted and become butterflies and produced caterpillars of their own.

I have been a big fan of the pawpaw for many years. I have slurped the custardy substance within its fallen blackened and wrinkled fruits on many a September walk, and saved the large mahogany seeds to craft into earrings. I have watched in amazement as the young zebra swallowtails energetically flit back and forth from the pawpaw groves in spring in search of flower nectar and mates. I have been fascinated as the graceful bell-shaped flowers transition from bright spring green to dried-blood-red and emit their disgusting carrion scent to draw pollinators. I so enjoy sharing the pawpaw's story with fellow walkers-in-the-woods.

My spring-autumn duo of pawpaw pieces attempts to visually tell part of the story. The early-autumn composition stars a nearly-ripe fruit rendered in watercolor and colored pencil, hanging below and framed by a spiral of the giant leaves drawn in graphite. The early-spring scene of a zebra swallowtail landing on the tip of a branch to oviposit, amid the colorful range of shapely flowers, is expressed in watercolor.