



Valerie Garrett embraces the heat and sweat as she sets up her Pawpaw Tree vendor tent at the Pawpaw Festival in Albany, OH on Friday, Sept. 13, 2019. Photo by [Nate Swanson](#) | The Post

CULTURE

Ohio Pawpaw Festival celebrates local ecology, promotes sustainability

By [Isabel Nissley](#)

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The 23rd annual [Ohio Pawpaw Festival](#) will be held at Lake Snowden in Albany, Ohio, from Sept. 17 through Sept. 19. A celebration of the local pawpaw trees and fruit, the festival incorporates pawpaws into almost all of its events – from a pawpaw cook-off to a pawpaw beer tasting.

Chris Chmiel founded the Pawpaw Festival to “educate people and get people excited” about pawpaws. It began as the Albany Pawpaw Festival, then evolved to become the Ohio Pawpaw Festival. Although a

number of other communities host pawpaw festivals as well, the Ohio Pawpaw Fest is one of the larger, older events.

“I think it's a unique draw,” Chmiel said. “I mean, a lot of people have never had a pawpaw, they don't know what a pawpaw is, so it's a unique reason to travel somewhere.”

In 2019, around 10,000 people attended the Pawpaw Festival, Chmiel said. In 2020, the festival did not happen, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, with the pandemic still occurring, organizers have had to adapt festival plans to incorporate coronavirus safety procedures. Although the event is outside, the Pawpaw Fest recommends that everyone wear a face mask.

The festival has changed in many ways over the years, but one aspect that has remained consistent is the Pawpaw Festival's commitment to sustainability. Through a partnership with [Zero Waste Event Productions](#), the Pawpaw Festival is working to send no waste to the landfill this year.

“(The Pawpaw Festival is) one of the events that is pretty wholeheartedly committed to doing all that they can to reduce waste,” Tyler Bonner, CEO of Zero Waste Event Productions, said.

In the past, the Pawpaw Festival incorporated a solar-powered stage and reusable beer glasses into its eco-friendly efforts. Expanding on those initiatives, food vendors at the 2021 Ohio Pawpaw Festival will utilize compostable plates, utensils and lids.

There will also be resource recovery stations located throughout the festival. At the stations, volunteers will sort waste, deciding whether the discarded goods should be composted, recycled or put in the garbage. Chmiel hopes that this year the festival is able to operate without sending any waste to a landfill.

“It's important to me and I think it's important to the tribe of people that come to the Pawpaw Fest as well,” Chmiel said.

Because of the pawpaw's regional prevalence, many Ohio University students are familiar with the trees. Aimee Chambers, a junior studying communication studies, is from West Virginia. She remembers learning

what pawpaws were when she was young. Now, Chambers associates them with home.

“I have a plethora of pawpaw trees in my backyard and scattered over our property,” Chambers said in a message. “Since pawpaw trees are native, almost everyone I know from my hometown can recognize them.”

Chambers has never been to the Ohio Pawpaw Festival, but was interested in the idea of it.

OU students can take a free shuttle from Baker University Center to the Pawpaw Festival all weekend. The first bus departs from the bottom of Baker at 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 17 and the final bus leaves the Pawpaw Fest at 3 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 19.

The Ohio Pawpaw Festival begins on Sept. 17 at 4 p.m. and ends on Sept. 19. At 5 p.m. Admission to the festival for the weekend is \$40. Day passes for Friday or Sunday can be purchased for \$15 and a day pass for Saturday can be purchased for \$20. Tickets can be found [online](#).