

Musa spp.: Banana¹

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Introduction

Large, fleshy, upright stalks topped with soft, smooth, arching leaves signifies the banana plant. Ranging from six feet for the dwarf species to over 30 feet for the largest types, banana trees are guaranteed to lend a tropical flavor to any landscape setting. The broad, tender leaves are easily torn by winds and plants should be located in a sheltered area to prevent this. The easily-grown banana tree is ideal for planters near the pool, located around garden ponds, or clustered together for an exotic effect. The unusual reddish-purple flowers are followed by clusters of upward-pointing green fruit, maturing to a beautiful yellow.

General Information

Scientific name: *Musa spp.*

Pronunciation: MEW-suh species

Common name(s): banana

Family: *Musaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to southeast Asia

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central, South)

Uses: fruit; specimen; container or planter



Figure 1. Full Form - *Musa spp.*: banana
Credits: UF/IFAS

Description

Height: 10 to 30 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: upright/erect, palm

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Range

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: spiral

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire, undulate

Leaf shape: oblong

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen

Leaf blade length: > 3 feet

Leaf color: medium green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf - *Musa spp.*: banana
Credits: UF/IFAS

Flower

Flower color: yellowish white

Flower characteristics: showy; emerges in clusters of 10-20 underneath a teardrop-shaped, reddish-purple husk that occurs at the end of a long stalk



Figure 4. Flower - *Musa spp.*: banana
Credits: UF/IFAS

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: 2 to 10 inches

Fruit covering: fleshy, seedless berry

Fruit color: from green to yellow when ripe

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fruiting: ripen approximately 80-180 days after flowering

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: multi-trunked (pseudostems); no thorns

Bark: brown, fleshy, upright stalks with remnant leaf petioles shredded about

Pruning requirement: needed for consistent fruit production

Breakage: not applicable

Current year twig color: not applicable

Current year twig thickness: not applicable

Wood specific gravity: unknown



Figure 5. Fruit - *Musa* spp.: banana
Credits: UF/IFAS



Figure 6. Bark - *Musa* spp.: banana
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Culture

Light requirement: full sun to partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: little

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: resistant

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Growing best on fertile, moist soil, bananas will thrive in full sun or partial shade and should be protected from both wind and cold. Plants respond well to regular fertilization. Too many suckers should not be allowed to develop since this will decrease the ability of any one plant to produce a good bunch of fruit. By allowing suckers to develop only at periodic intervals, a succession of fruiting can be obtained. Banana bunches should be harvested when the fruit is still green and allowed to ripen in a cool, dark place. It produces fruit in USDA hardiness zones 8b and 9 only when winter temperatures stay above freezing. Plants killed to the ground which sprout from the soil in the spring will not produce fruit until the following year.

Many different species of banana are available. Some ornamental types are grown for foliage or flowers. *Musa coccinea* has brilliant red bracts, while *Musa rosea* has pink bracts. Both hold up very well as cut flowers. *Musa acuminata*, 'Dwarf Cavendish', is one of the best fruit cultivars. It has large bunches with large fruit and the plant's small size makes it easier to protect from wind. The tall-growing 'Ladyfinger' has small bunches of small bananas but they are very thin-skinned and delicious. *Musa velutina* grows three to four feet tall with three-foot leaves that are green above and bronzy beneath. The upright pink bracts has orange flowers and yield velvety pink fruit.

Propagation is by division of the suckers.

Pests

Scales and nematodes are of its two common pests.

Diseases

Sigatoka leaf-spot, Cercospora leaf-spot, and Panama disease may infect this tree.

References

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