

# Musa spp.: Banana<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Dennis G. Watson, Ryan W. Klein, Andrew K. Koeser, Deborah R. Hilbert, and Drew C. McLean<sup>2</sup>

## 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  
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## 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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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; Andrew K. Koeser, assistant professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center; Deborah R. Hilbert, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; and Drew C. McLean, biological scientist, Environmental Horticulture Department, GCREC; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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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  
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## 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  
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Figure 6. Bark - *Musa* spp.: banana  
Credits: Gitta Hasing, UF/IFAS

## 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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