

Musa spp.

Native to India and China, the banana has been successfully grown throughout Florida for many years. It thrives during hot, humid weather and grows best in rich, well-drained soil. It is not a true tree; in fact, it's the world's largest herb and it grows more like grass as the main stem of the plant known as a "rhizome" remains below the ground.

"Banana" usually refers to soft, sweet "dessert" bananas. Whereas *Musa* cultivars with firmer, starchier fruit are called plantains or "cooking bananas". The terms "plantain" and "banana" are sometimes interchangeable depending on their usage.

Plants may freeze to the ground when temperatures drop below 32 degrees. However, since the main stem (rhizome) is protected underground, the banana will resprout with the return of warm weather. If plants are protected and well cared for, flowering and fruiting should occur after a 10- to 15-month growth period.

Banana plants do not grow from a seed but rather from a corm or rhizome (a bulb-like root). Each bulb will sprout new shoots year after year and each stalk will only produce one bunch of bananas. Once harvested, the main stalk should be cut to the ground (since it will never fruit again) to allow room for new stalks to develop and eventually flower and fruit.

Planting

Bananas can grow in a wide variety of soils but need well-drained, rich soil in full or half-day sun. Raised beds are best, as the plant does not tolerate poor drainage or flooding.

The planting site should be protected from wind and cold weather, if possible. The warmest location in the home landscape is usually near the south or southeast side of the house. For ornamental

purposes, bananas may be planted as close as 2 to 3 feet apart, but those planted for fruit production should be spaced about 8 to 10 feet apart.

Plant in the ground at soil level and apply 3" or less of mulch around the top of the root zone to keep the soil moist. Keep mulch at least 6 inches away from the base of the plants.

Water regularly in spring and summer and slightly less during fall and winter.

Fertilizing

Their rapid growth makes banana plants heavy feeders. We recommend fertilizing mature plants with 1½ to 2 pounds of **Espoma Plant-Tone** or **Sunniland 6-6-6** each month. Young banana plants need 1/4 to 1/3 as much. Spread the fertilizer evenly in a 4 foot circle around the base.

Manures and natural organics (e.g. mushroom compost can also be used in addition to fertilizer).

Fruit and Harvesting

After a 10- to 15-month growth cycle, a central stalk pushes up through the center of the leaf stalk and starts to flower. Until they open, the flowers are covered by purplish bracts and the end of the stalk has one huge, heavy purple-maroon bud. Flowers bloom and fruit develops without pollination in groups called "hands". Harvest fruit when the first hand of bananas begins to turn yellow (approximately 90 days). Remove the entire stem from the plant or cut the bananas a hand at a time and hang in a cool, shady spot. The lower bud or male flower can be removed at any time after all hands of bananas have formed, though removal is not necessary.

The logo for Rockledge Gardens features the name in a teal, serif font. The word "Rockledge" is on the top line and "Gardens" is on the bottom line, with a decorative teal swoosh underline beneath "Gardens".

When available from the growers, we carry the following banana varieties:

VARIETY	HEIGHT	USE	FRUIT SIZE	COMMENTS
1000 Fingers	10-12ft	eat	1 ½-2 ½"	Unique as it is beautiful, this banana produces a stalk of tiny round bananas that can continue to make fruit until it touches the ground (sometimes 5ft long or more). Though mostly used for ornamentation, the fruit is edible and sweet.
Apple/Manzano	10-12ft	cook/eat	4-6"	Delicious sweet dessert banana with an apple-like aftertaste. Fruit is plump and firm. Otherwise similar to Ladyfinger. Attractive plant. Wind tolerant.
Dwarf Cavendish	5-8ft	eat	6-8"	Dwarf variety of traditional store-bought banana. Grows quickly and is a great producer. Thick, solid trunk. Fairly wind tolerant. Medium-sized good quality fruit. Most common and widely produced banana.
Giant Plantain	10-15ft	cook	6"	Rather slender trunk with long fruit.
Goldfinger	10-12ft	Eat/cook	4-6"	Outstanding producer of delicious bananas with a lemony flavor. Smaller, creamier, and sweeter than Cavendish. Good wind and excellent disease resistance. Good for eating or cooking. Not as sweet as most bananas, but very tasty. Very productive and easy to grow. Probably the next major commercial variety.
Gran Nain	5-7ft	eat	10-12"	Commercial variety most often found in stores. Derived from Dwarf Cavendish, but produces higher yields.
Honduran Red (Jamaican Red, Cuban Red)	8-10ft	eat	5-6"	Known by many names, this extremely tasty and sweet fruit has a hint of peach in the taste. The fruit itself turns sunset colors (orange, red, burgundy) while ripening. They have brownish-red skins and smooth, yellowish-pink, sweet flesh with a creamy texture.
Hua Moa	12-14ft	cook/eat	5-6"	Excellent Hawaiian plantain. Short and stubby, but packed with flavor. Large round leaves. World's best cooking banana.
Ice Cream (Blue Java)	14-18ft	eat	5-6"	Flesh is snow white and sweet. Creamy texture and taste is similar to vanilla ice cream. Fruit is medium-sized, wedge-shaped and bluish-green until ripe when it turns yellow. Wind-resistant leaves. Very hardy with good cold tolerance.
Ladyfinger	6-8ft	eat	3-4"	Very tasty Indian cultivar. Smaller, creamier, and sweeter than Cavendish. Fairly hardy tree. Wind and disease resistant.
Mysore	10-14ft	eat	5-6"	Delicious ladyfinger-like banana. Important commercial variety in India with good shelf life. Smaller, creamer, and sweeter than Cavendish. Attractive green leaves with a red midriff.
Orinoco (Horse Banana)	10-12ft	cook/eat	8-10"	This dual-purpose banana is delicious when used like a green plantain or eaten fresh when ripe. The fruit tastes best when left on the plant until yellow. The angular fruit is long and thick. Long established in Florida, this hardy variety can endure wind and cold. Orinoco needs to be supported when carrying large heads of fruit.
Pisang Ceylon	10-14ft	eat	5-6"	An improved version of 'Mysore', this is a very cold hardy, high quality, sweet-fleshed fruit. It is the number one variety in India.