**Musa spp.: Banana**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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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 upwardly-pointing green fruit, maturing to a beautiful yellow.

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**General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Musa* spp.  
**Pronunciation:** MEW-suh species  
**Common name(s):** Banana  
**Family:** Musaceae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential  
**Uses:** fruit; specimen; container or planter  
**Availability:** not native to North America

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**Description**

**Height:** 10 to 30 feet  
**Spread:** 10 to 15 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** irregular  
**Crown shape:** upright/erect, palm

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Crown density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

**Foliage**
- **Leaf arrangement:** spiral (Fig. 3)
- **Leaf type:** simple
- **Leaf margin:** entire, undulate
- **Leaf shape:** oblong
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
- **Leaf blade length:** more than 36 inches
- **Leaf color:** green
- **Fall color:** no color change
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

![Figure 3. Foliage](image)

**Flower**
- **Flower color:** purple, orange
- **Flower characteristics:** showy

**Fruit**
- **Fruit shape:** elongated
- **Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches, 3 to 6 inches
- **Fruit covering:** fleshy
- **Fruit color:** yellow, green
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**
- **Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don’t droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** needed for strong structure
- **Breakage:** resistant
- **Current year twig color:** not applicable
- **Current year twig thickness:**
- **Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**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 acuminate*, ‘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.