

Musa

Dwarf Edible Banana

INTRODUCTION

Bananas are fast-growing herbaceous perennials arising from underground rhizomes. The fleshy stalks or pseudostems formed by upright concentric layers of leaf sheaths constitute the functional trunks. The true stem begins as an underground corm which grows upwards, pushing its way out through the center of the stalk 10-15 months after planting, eventually producing the terminal inflorescence which will later bear the fruit. Each stalk produces one huge flower cluster and then dies. New stalks then grow from the rhizome. Banana plants are extremely decorative, ranking next to palm trees for the tropical feeling they lend to the landscape.

LOCATION AND PLANTING

Bananas love sun and heat so pick a sunny location where they will receive light most of the day. Fruiting banana plants will stop growing if in a mostly shady location; as well shady locations tend to stay wet longer especially in the winter when it is important to reduce watering as it may lead to root rot. Bananas like well draining organic soil that is rocky and has lava sand, much like you would find in Hawaii. We have had best results with cactus mix soils and the best product has been Miracle Gro Cactus, Palm & Citrus Mix (available at www.LarrysOrchids.com, or if you have a Lowes or Home Depot in your area). It contains lava rock, lava sand amongst other beneficial items. Start your plant in a one-gallon pot. Be prepared to move it into a larger pot (3-gallon) within 6 months. Do not over pot your plant by just planting it in a 3-gallon pot to start. It needs to become root-bound in the smaller pot before being transplanted.

WATERING

Bananas need regular watering to sustain the large tropical leaves and produce sweet tasty fruit. You should expect to water slowly and deeply every 2 or 3 days during the warmer months. A test when to water is when the top 1/2-1 inch of soil is dry. If you planted in a shady spot or one that tends to stay wet for some other reason you may have water less. Bananas are susceptible to root rot and don't like continually wet soil or standing water, though this should only be a concern during the winter as during the midst of summer it is important that you water and don't be afraid to do so as the result would be equally as bad. Banana plants stop growing during the cooler months when temperatures stay below 50's so wont need much water. Don't take this to mean that you let the plant just dry out, it just means that between watering every couple of weeks and our normal winter rains your plant should survive just fine.

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WINTER CARE AND FROST PROTECTION

Your potted banana will need to come in the house for the winter, once nighttime temps are in the 50's. Reduce your watering by half, and the plant will go semi-dormant. It can go back outside in the Spring, once night-time temps are once again over 50.

FERTILIZING

Banana plants are heavy feeders and would benefit greatly from regular feeding all during the growing season. Best would be to apply a small amount of a balanced fertilizer containing all the secondary and micro nutrients every time you water, next best would be to give a full dose of fertilizer once a month. When the flower is produced I recommend cutting back on nitrogen (N) if you are using a chemical fertilizer as it can turn the fruit black, but continuing to feed with a product that still contains a good amount of potassium (K). Organic fertilizer is less of a concern and a search on the Internet will lead to many suggestions. Also there are a number of products in the stores that work well, from bat guano, fish emulsion to liquid sea weed, just make sure if you are growing your banana plants for fruit that you feed them regularly in order for the plant to produce the maximum size and number of fruit the plant is capable of.

SOIL

As mentioned in the location and planting paragraph, banana plants like well draining soil with lots of organic matter. Do not use potting soil as this contains a great deal of peat which tends to stay too wet and subject your plant to root rot. Strange as it may seem to you the best product to use believe it or not is cactus/palm mix. True a banana plant is not a cactus however both like sandy, rocky, organic soil that drains very well, the difference is you are going to water a banana plant far more than you are a cactus. Last you should mulch with a good brand of compost to a depth of 2-4 inches around your plant in the pot. This will act as slow release fertilizer as it decomposes but also help in soil evaporation.

WINDS

Though the banana plant can withstand a good deal of wind and it is unlikely that it would be toppled, summer monsoons can mean trouble when they are carrying a large head of fruit. Depending on when the plant produces its fruit stock it may be necessary to support the fruit stock with two poles during spring winds or summer monsoons to prevent it from snapping off in a high wind.

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SUN AND HEAT

Though not necessary, as with most non native plants they would appreciate an afternoon break from the suns most intense rays during summer months, especially if carrying fruit. The banana fruit is sensitive to sunburn, so in the case that the fruit is produced on the west side of the plant you would benefit by draping it with shade cloth or other light weight material.