

Growing Bananas

The banana variety recommended for south Florida homeowners is “Dwarf Cavendish”. Other varieties adaptable to south Florida’s climate are “Apple”, “Lady Finger”, “Honey”. Bananas flourish under uniformly warm conditions, but need protection from frost and exposure to strong winds. The plant is severely injured at 28 degrees and may be killed to the ground, new growth (called suckers) usually sprout from the underground stem with the return of warm weather.

Banana plants need fertile conditions and an abundance of soil moisture – provided the soil is well-drained – for best growth and fruit production. In sandy soils, a heavy application of organic mulch should be placed around the plants to suppress weeds and conserve moisture and plant nutrients. A heavy mulch should be constantly renewed as it decays. The banana plant is a heavy constant feeder and usually will respond better to frequent light applications of low analysis fertilizer rather than from infrequent heavy applications.

A strong plant bears fruit when it is 12 to 18 months old, and has had 2 consecutive frost-free years. From flowering to maturity takes about 3 months. When the banana plant begins to flower, the terminal inflorescence forces its way upward through the stalk emerging from the top of the plant in the form of a purplish-red heart-shaped stalk; this flower stalk will bend downward and the clusters of fruits (called hands) turn upward as they develop. Each stalk produces fruit just once. The old stalk, after flowering, should be chopped down and cut up as mulch. New stalks will arise as suckers from the base and in turn will produce fruit. For more information on growing bananas contact the Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener volunteers M-F 9-4 at 233-1750.

