



BANANA TREES

Few plants can give your sunroom, deck or patio that tropical look like banana trees. Not a true “tree”, bananas grow from underground rhizomes, forming a pseudo-trunk, with large, showy leaves that shred naturally in the wind, giving the plant its exotic look. Bananas do best in full sun to part sun, with soil kept moist, but not soggy. Temperatures must be 55F or better to produce new leaves.

For tropical bananas, protect the root ball from freezing by storing the plant in an attached garage, or in a crawl space that doesn't freeze. If you have room and sun inside, a banana can be kept as a house plant. In a sunroom or conservatory, where the growing season can be extended to a year or more, a banana may mature and produce fruit.

There are a few varieties of “hardy” banana that are tender perennials in our area, where the roots survive the winter with protection, and send up new growth in the spring. Mulch well to protect rhizomes in winter. When the leaves die back, cut the tree back to 2' or 3' in height, and it will grow back quickly when temperatures warm up again. For an alternative method of protecting hardy bananas, see “tip” below.

POPULAR BANANAS:

HARDY BANANAS:

BLOODLEAF or ROJO (*Musa acuminata sumatrana* or 'Zebrina')—Small (6' to 8'), ornamental banana grown for its beautiful red and green variegated leaves.

CHINESE YELLOW (*Musa lasiocarpa*)—Small (4'-5'), exotic yellow flowered Chinese banana, ornamental and cold hardy.

MUSA BASJOO (“Hardy Fiber Banana”)—Medium (8' to 12'), cold hardy ornamental banana. *M. basjoo* is the most cold hardy banana available. It is said to tolerate temperatures below -10°F. Produces tiny (2.25” long) ornamental bananas in large bunches. Very fast growing in warm weather.

ORNAMENTAL BANANAS:

DWARF CAVENDISH—Small (5' to 6'), small edible fruit.

MUSA ORNATA—Medium (5' to 9'), beautiful ornamental banana, several color varieties available.

RED ABYSSINIAN BANANA (*Ensete Maurelii*)—Medium, to 8' in a container, huge 10' long leaves.

VELUTINA (“Velvet Pink Banana”)—Small (5' to 7'), ornamental with attractive pink flower and fuzzy pink fruit.

EDIBLE BANANAS:

DWARF RED—Small (6' to 8'), with lots of edible fruit (2 years to mature).

CARDABA—Tall (10' to 12'), blue-green edible bananas.

DWARF ORINOCO—Small (5' to 6'), moderately cold tolerant, thick-skinned edible fruit.

MUSA 'HIGH COLOR MINI'—Small (2.5 to 3.5 feet, variegated Dwarf Cavendish, dessert banana.

MUSA 'ICE CREAM' (Blue Java)—Tall, to 15', blue-green, sweet fruit.

RAJI PURI—Small (6'-8'), sweet edible fruit, cold and wind resistant.

SUPER DWARF (*Musa acuminata* 'Super Dwarf')—Great for indoor use, only 2'-3' in height, produces small edible fruit.

TIP: To protect a “hardy” banana from freezing, form a wire cage around the trunk as tall as the height of trunk you wish to protect. Fill the cage with leaves, pine tags, or straw for insulation. Using light organic material like this will help prevent water from rotting the trunk. Cut the top of the banana to a point about 6” to 10” below the top of the cage, then fill the top with more insulating material. The entire cage can also be wrapped with burlap or landscape fabric. This should retain enough heat to protect the trunk. With warm weather, remove the cage and wait for new leaves to appear. Do not despair if your trunk doesn't survive, as new plants should grow from the base in the spring.