



NEW GARDEN
LANDSCAPING & NURSERY

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Bananas

Nothing beats the dramatic presence of large-leafed tropical plants to get that "vacation at home" feel. Fortunately, bananas are relatively simple to grow outdoors in summer, and can even be kept indoors in winter if you'd like to enjoy them the following year. A few types of bananas are even hardy outdoors here and can be left in the garden to sprout the following spring.

Choose container that's "just right" for your banana, not too big and not too small. The banana should look proportionate in the pot. In containers, bananas require a well-drained soil and constant moisture—they don't want to get completely dry. Water when the top 1" of soil is dry to the touch. Bananas are heavy feeders so for best (and spectacular) results, they should be watered with a dilute liquid fertilizer solution (1/2 strength) plus 1T Epsom salt per gallon every time you water, or use a slow release fertilizer like Osmocote® along with liquid fertilizer at 1/2 strength plus Epsom salt added to the water once a week. A fertilizer with a high N-low P-high K is the best type for bananas (try Ladybug brand John's Recipe which is 3-1.5-2), but a balanced fertilizer (equal numbers for N-P-K) of any type will do.

If you want to keep a hardy banana in the ground over the winter, prepare a spot in the garden with plenty of organic material and soil amendments to provide good drainage.

Bananas love heat and humidity, and need bright light to do well, though most varieties will tolerate bright afternoon shade. Place them where they get some protection from strong winds, as that can cause the leaves to shred. Although perfectly natural and not harmful to the plant, most people prefer the leaves intact.

Older outside leaves can be removed if they get too discolored. A banana in active growth will continue to push leaves out from the top center all summer.

Bananas suffer from few pests, though spider mites can be a problem in hot dry summers. Wet the leaves down top and bottom every time you water to discourage spider mites, and treat with any pesticide labeled for spider mites if they become established.

Overwintering Bananas

If your banana is a dwarf or stayed fairly small, you can bring it in before frost in fall and treat as a houseplant, placing it in the brightest spot you have (preferably a south or west window). Stop fertilizing if no new leaves are being produced.

If it has gotten larger, you can try overwintering by cutting the banana back to about a 2' "stump" (Don't cut back Dwarf Yellow Bananas, but remove all brown or damaged leaves). Place the banana, pot and all, in a cool place that does not freeze. Water only sparingly through the winter and don't use fertilizer. In spring when the weather warms, cut back the trunk to a firm area if it has gotten mushy (leave it alone if it's just dry), place the banana out-

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Common bananas

Japanese Fiber Banana-*Musa Basjoo*
(hardy)
Hardy to zone 6, can reach up to 15' under ideal conditions after a few years.

Blood Banana-*Musa zebrina*
Beautiful red-splashed leaves

Dwarf Cavendish Banana-*Musa cavendishii*
Stays fairly small to about 6' tall. If kept indoor in bright light in winter, occasionally will produce flowers & fruit. This is a dwarf version of the supermarket banana.

Chinese Dwarf Yellow Banana-*Musella lasiocarpa*, aka *Ensete lasiocarpa*
(hardy)
More shrublike than typical bananas, it is very hardy. At a few years old it can produce a large, waxy yellow flower that lasts for months. Left in the ground it can produce very large clumps reaching about 6' tall. Does not produce edible fruit.

Red Maureli Banana, Red Abyssinian Banana-*Ensete maurelii*
Short trunked, reddish leaves. Great as a container "thriller".



Bananas

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side and water. Begin with fertilizer as soon as you see new leaves emerging from the center of the trunk.

You must overwinter hardy bananas in containers as described above as the roots will not have enough protection in a pot to survive winter. Hardy bananas planted outdoors will often survive winter with no special protection in zone 7, although the leaves and part of the trunk will freeze and die-just cut the damaged parts off. Even if the entire trunk is frozen in winter, the corm underground will begin to push out stems when the soil warms-be patient! An established Basjoo banana can put on over 10' of growth in a single season, so even a Basjoo frozen to the ground will be a spectacular specimen by late summer.

Banana fruit

It is very difficult to provide a long enough, uninterrupted growing season to get a banana to flower and fruit outside of the tropics without a greenhouse. Plus, bananas die after flowering and fruiting, sending up sprouts called "pups" to carry on. Enjoy your banana plant for the great foliage and buy bananas from the supermarket!



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