



Urban Harvest  
Gardening for good.

## Bananas

Category:	Semi-tropical
Hardiness:	Varies by variety
Fruit family:	N/A
Light:	Full sun
Size:	15'-20'H x 6'-10'W
Soil:	Moist, well-drained loam
Planting:	Spring, after danger of frost has passed



The banana plant is an underground corm with an above ground pseudo-stem (a tight spiral of leaves that looks like a “trunk”). Bananas worth growing here are very hardy semi-tropicals. There are hundreds of varieties, but only a few are both hardy enough and good tasting enough to be worth the effort.

The plant can act as a tall, usually evergreen, quick-growing screen. The ripe fruit can be frozen for smoothies or dipped in citrus juice and dried for a delicious snack.

### Care of Banana Plants

**Planting:** Bananas grow best at 80°F or warmer. They do poorly in windy, salty, or shady places. The ideal site for a banana is a sunny, raised bed of good loam. It should be protected from excessive wind and cold. They also need good drainage.

A single plant takes up very little space near the ground, but may take up to ten feet at its crown. Since it sprouts new pseudo-stems from the base, allow at least six feet spacing from other plants.

**Pruning & Training:** Bananas produce many suckers or offshoots. Most of these should be removed monthly during the growing season. Ideally, you should go into winter with two stalks that are a minimum of 10-feet tall and that have not yet borne a fruit stalk, and perhaps two small pups that will repeat this next summer. All others need to be removed by digging a sharp spade into the soil between sucker and mother plant. These suckers can be planted in shaded pots or composted. In mid-spring, cut off any damaged leaves that are reachable to increase sunlight for the suckers below.

Bearing bananas may need to be supported. Two stakes or poles fastened together to form an "X" at the top can be used to hold up the banana bunch. The plant may be tied to sturdy stakes so it doesn't break under the weight of the bunch.

**Production:** When the plant has grown enough leaves, it produces a long stalk of self-pollinated flowers. The flowers are followed by fruits that are borne in a bunch. A bunch is comprised of “hands” of fruit along the flower stalk. Bananas don’t grow below 50°F, so you will only get edible bananas if they flower before the end of July at the latest.

**Watering:** When temperatures are above 50°F at night, bananas need at least 4” of water per month. They would prefer 6”-7”. They will benefit from timed irrigation.

**Fertilizing:** Bananas grow rapidly and are heavy feeders. Apply a balanced fertilizer once a month from February to August. A mature plant may require as much as 1-1/2 to 2 pounds each month. Young plants need 1/4 to 1/3 as much. Spread the fertilizer evenly around the plant in a circle extending 4’ – 8’ from the trunk. Do not allow the fertilizer to come in contact with the trunk. Feed container plants on the same monthly schedule using about half the rate for in-ground plants.

**Harvesting:** Bananas should not turn yellow on the plant. Harvest when all of the hands have reached full size, there are no more new ones growing, the rather angled shape of the banana softens somewhat, and the color begins to lighten. One sign this is happening is that the distance from the lowest bananas to the flower bud will be a yard or more and the flower will have shed much of its size.

Wear old clothes to harvest; bananas will stain them. Carefully saw through the flower stem and sever the bunch from the plant. Make sure you are not under the falling bunch since it is quite heavy. Put the bunch on newspaper in a cool dry place where the stem can bleed. If you want to ripen a few fruits to eat quickly, place them in a closed paper sack or kitchen pot with an apple in it.

**Pests:** Bananas are not generally bothered by pests.

**Winter Protection:** Because the important part is under ground, and even our worst freezes are of short duration, bananas have been grown here for many decades. When their stems are a year old, they should survive into the high teens. The underground corm should survive any temperature we might get.

## Varieties of Banana for the 2018 Sale

### *Ice Cream (Blue Java)*

## Varieties of Banana for Southeast Texas

**Ice Cream (Blue Java):** This variety grows well in Houston and is likely to grow very well in all parts of Southeast Texas except Central Texas that routinely experience lows below 20°F. This fruit is very sweet, delicious and creamy with 6” - 8”, white-fleshed fruit that has a faint bluish skin before ripening to yellow. The Ice Cream banana is very fast growing with production in 9-18 months. In very favorable settings, it can develop one-foot-thick diameter stems 20 feet high. The plant is a vibrant green color with very large leaves. Bunches typically have four sets of 4-5 hands of bananas, so a typical plant produces over 100 bananas per bunch.