

South Florida Tropicals: Banana¹

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Background

Bananas, America's favorite fruit, are native to Southeast Asia, but are grown throughout the tropical and warm subtropical world. Most of Florida's supply of bananas comes from Latin America. Bananas grow best in areas with constant warm temperatures and protection from

strong winds. Plants may be injured or killed to the ground at freezing temperatures.

There are two broad groups of bananas: dessert bananas, which can be eaten raw or cooked; and plantains, which are starchy and must be cooked before eating. This publication focuses on the dessert banana (*Musa* species) commonly available in supermarkets, and known as the "Yellow Cavendish" variety. There are many dooryard varieties of bananas grown in South Florida. The most common dooryard varieties include: "Apple Banana," "Hua Moa," and "Dwarf Cavendish."

Availability

All year.

Selection and Ripening

Bunches of bananas are harvested when the "fingers" are plump but before they begin to turn yellow. For best results, hang a bunch of unripe bananas in a cool, shady place. Ethylene gas helps initiate and stimulate ripening. Since mature fruit produces ethylene gas, ripening can be hastened by covering the bunch with a plastic bag.

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Ripening stages:

1. Green tipped or “turning ripe.” The peel is pale yellow with green ends. The pulp is firm, starchy, and slightly tart. Bananas at this stage of ripeness may be cooked, baked, boiled, or fried.

2. All yellow or “hard ripe.” The peel is all yellow, sometimes with a trace of green on the tip. The pulp is firm, and 80% to 90% of the starch has been changed to fruit sugars.

3. Flecked with brown or “fully ripe.” The peel is deeper yellow with brown flecks. The pulp is mellow, and practically all starch has been changed to fruit sugars.

Storage

Ripe bananas keep at room temperature for several days. They keep getting darker and sweeter when kept at room temperature. Bananas can be refrigerated, dried, or frozen when ripe. Bananas tend to darken and lose texture when frozen. They can be satisfactorily frozen whole as popsicles, or as a puree. They *do not* freeze well as slices, in syrup, fruit cups, or frozen gelatin. Keeping time for the puree is a maximum of 6 months—a shorter period is advised.

Uses

Bananas are a favorite for fresh eating. They can also be used in fruit cups, salads, drinks, desserts, pies, baked goods, sandwich spreads, and for infant feeding.

Nutritive Value

Bananas are low in sodium and rich in potassium. They also have small amounts of calcium, copper, iodine, iron, phosphorous, zinc and vitamins A, B, and C. A medium banana contains:

90 calories
350 milligrams of potassium
1 gram of protein
23 grams of carbohydrates
trace amount of fat

Source: USDA NDB Number: 09040

Yield

1 cup = 2 medium bananas
1 cup = 3 to 4 small bananas

Food Safety During Preparation

- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after:
- Handling fresh produce

- Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- Using the bathroom
- Changing diapers
- Handling pets
- Wash fresh bananas with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Table 1.

To Sanitize
Mix one teaspoon of unscented chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
Pour the mixture onto the surface and let sit at least one minute.
Rinse well with hot running water.

- Don't cross contaminate. Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of food-borne illness.

Using Bananas

Tropicals may vary in natural pectin, acid and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

Sauteed Bananas

Sauteed bananas are a simple and delicious dessert, needing no sugar. Melt 2 tablespoons of margarine in a skillet and add 4 whole firm bananas. If desired add two tablespoons of your favorite fruit juice. Cook over low heat, turning once, cooking just until tender, about 5 minutes. Serves 4.

Table 2.

TIPS: Citrus juices (orange, lemon, lime, etc.) help prevent bananas from turning brown after cutting.
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Banana Yogurt Lite

1 ripe banana
8 ounces of low-fat or non-fat plain or vanilla yogurt
1 tablespoon orange juice

Peel banana, place in small bowl, and mash with a fork. Stir in yogurt and orange juice. Cover and refrigerate.

Banana Pops

Children love banana pops, a nutritious, easy-to-make snack that most kids can make by themselves using a plastic knife. Parents can pre-chop items for dipping and store covered in the refrigerator. Peel and cut firm, ripe bananas into any size chunks, and spear with a toothpick, popsicle stick, or small skewer. Dip in orange juice to prevent browning, and roll in any of the following: crushed cereal, finely chopped nuts, wheat germ, or shredded coconut. Serve the pops right away or freeze in an airtight bag and serve frozen.

Banana Milkshake

- 1 very ripe banana
- 1 cup low fat (1%) milk
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

Choose a banana with skin flecked with brown spots or with entirely brown skin. Peel and press through a medium sieve or mash with a fork. Add other ingredients, gradually stirring with fork until well mixed. Chill thoroughly; beat with rotary beater or shake in fruit jar. If using an electric blender the banana need not be mashed. Serve in a tall glass. 1 serving.

Variation. Add 3 tablespoons guava juice and 1 tablespoon sugar.

Banana Bran Muffins

- ½ cup low fat milk (1%)
- 1 cup 100 percent bran cereal (not flakes)
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ cups mashed ripe bananas (about three)
- 2 eggs (or 4 egg whites)
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar or honey
- ¼ cup oil

Combine milk and cereal in a small bowl and set aside. Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients.

In a small bowl, combine bananas, eggs, and sugar. Stir in oil. Add to flour mixture along with softened bran. Mix with fork just until moistened.

Microwave: Line each compartment of a microwave muffin pan or six custard cups with two cupcake papers. Fill each three-quarters full. Rotating midway through cooking, microwave on 70 percent (medium-high) 4 to 5 minutes, or until top is no longer moist. Repeat procedure. For last three muffins, microwave on 70 percent for 2 to 2½ minutes. Makes 15 muffins.

Oven: Bake at 375° for 20-25 minutes.

No-bake Banana Cookies

- 2 cups (about 7 ounces) finely crushed vanilla wafers
- ½ cup wheat germ
- ½ cup mashed ripe banana
- ¼ cup shredded coconut
- ¼ cup confectioner's sugar, wheat germ or crushed cereal

In medium bowl, combine wafer crumbs, wheat germ, mashed banana, and coconut. Mix well. Form into 1-inch balls. Roll balls in confectioner's sugar, wheat germ or crushed cereal. Store in covered container. Yields about 3 dozen.

Banana Waldorf Salad

- 1 medium red apple, unpared
- ½ cup celery, diced
- ¼ to ½ cup walnut pieces
- ¼ cup reduced fat mayonnaise or salad dressing
- 2 ripe bananas
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- Salad greens, as desired

Wash, core and dice unpared apples. Combine with celery, nuts, mayonnaise, and orange juice. Peel bananas and slice about 1/8 to ¼ inch thick. Fold bananas carefully into apple mixture. Serve on crisp lettuce or other salad greens. Just before serving, garnish with slices of fully ripe banana, nuts, sprigs of watercress or parsley.

Banana & Peanut Butter Spread

- ½ cup peanut butter
- ¼ cup hot water OR evaporated fat free milk
- ¾ cup mashed ripe banana
- 2 to 3 tablespoons lemon or lime juice

Cream peanut butter, add hot water or evaporated milk, and blend thoroughly. Add mashed banana, and season with lemon or lime juice. Yields 1¼ cups.