

Musa sapientum

Musaceae

Indo-Malayan region

Ar: *Muze*
Km: *Banana*
Tr: *Banana*

Bl: *Banana*
Nr: *Mus*

Eng: *Banana*
Tg: *Banana*

Ecology: The banana is grown in all tropical and some sub-tropical countries. (The name "banana" comes from a West African Bantu language.) In Eritrea, bananas grew around the oldest monastery called Bizen. An Italian agriculturalist called Bardaty tested several varieties of Cavendish at Ghinda and Solomuna. The most successful wind-resistant variety was Dwarf Cavendish and it is now the most common variety planted in the eastern and western lowlands, mainly under irrigation. It grows best at 24-29°C, slowly below 20°C and above 35°C, and short periods at 5-8°C will prevent fruit forming.

Uses: **Food (fruit)**, drink (juice).

Description: A perennial herb usually 2-6 m with a basal corm below ground and a **very large rootstock**. The **lower leaf stalks and leaf sheaths** are rolled around each other to **make a "false stem"** from which the leaf blades push up and spread into the light. **LEAVES:** Arise in a spiral, about **30 together**. A **blade unrolls 2-3 m long and 60 cm wide** with many parallel veins at right angles to the midrib. In stormy weather or rain the blade tears along these veins. **FLOWERS:** After 9-10 months growth, a **single large flower head** emerges bearing many flower clusters, **each flower covered by a large red-brown-purple leafy bract**. Flowers, rich in nectar, have a female pistil and male stamens, but not all are fertile and only the first 5-15 clusters produce fruit. At the lower end a bulbous "male bud" remains. **FRUIT:** The **5-sided berry fruit** develop without fertilization, take 3 months to ripen and contain no seeds. The outer green-to-yellow skin separates easily from the soft inner flesh when ripe. In sweet bananas the sticky flesh converts to sugar.

Propagation: Suckers or rhizomes are used as stock (suckers up to 1 m high).

Management: Bare fallow, mulching, use of cover crops and swarding;

Remarks: Bananas prefer medium-textured good soils with high humus content and good drainage, pH 5.5-7.0. The potential area for banana cultivation in Eritrea may be some 170,000 ha. The average yield per hectare has been reported to be 13 tons. Bananas are sold both on the domestic and export markets. A good bunch of bananas may have 8 "hands" of 15 "fingers" each. Plants may yield fruit for 20 years. After fruiting, the plant dies down but suckers have already formed above ground at the base.

