



DESSERT BANANA

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Botanical name: *Musa* sp.
 Common varieties: Bluefields (Gros Michel), Brazilian (mistakenly called Apple banana), Chinese (Dwarf Cavendish), Williams, and Valery

Description

The banana is a broad-leaved plant that grows 8 to 25 feet high. The ripe fruit is cylindrical with a yellow peel protecting the tender pulp.

Although locally grown dessert bananas are available year-round, the peak banana season in Hawaii is August to November. This is when local bananas are least expensive. The price is usually higher from February to May, when fewer bananas are being harvested. Dessert bananas are best eaten fully ripe, or when the solid yellow skin is flecked with brown spots. Bananas with green tips have not yet reached their full flavor potential.

Local bananas may be purchased from grocery stores, health food stores, open markets, or roadside vendors. If you wish to grow your own, consult your local county extension agent for information.

Nutrition Information

One medium-large peeled banana weighing 100 grams provides 118 calories, obtained largely from carbohydrates. This is about the same number of calories as found in a medium-sized apple. The same banana also contains slightly more than .5 g of fiber, 15 mg of vitamin C, .08 mg of riboflavin, and 370 mg of potassium. It is not a good source of other major nutrients (see Fig. 1).

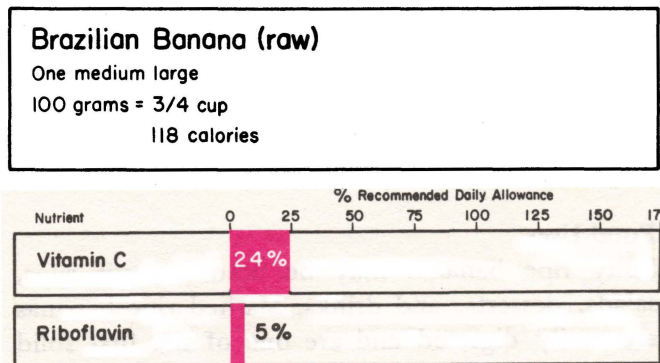


Figure 1. Major nutrients in 100 grams ripe Brazilian banana, given as percentage of U.S. RDA.

Because a banana provides approximately 15 percent of an adult's recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of 2.5 g potassium, bananas can be an important addition to the diet of people who take diuretics, which deplete the body of this essential nutrient.

Nutrients in 100 g ripe Brazilian banana

Calories	118	Vitamin A	158 IU
Protein	1 g	Thiamin (vit. B ₁)	.04 mg
Calcium	7 mg	Riboflavin (vit. B ₂)	.08 mg
Phosphorus	30 mg	Niacin	.6 mg
Iron	.3 mg	Ascorbic acid (vit. C)	15 mg

Storage and Preservation

A bunch of bananas, picked fully mature but green, may take several weeks to ripen. During this time they should be kept in a dark place at room temperature. Refrigerating the bananas may keep them from ripening.

Ripe bananas may be frozen whole and eaten like a popsicle, but overripe bananas should be frozen as a puree. To prevent darkening, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of ascorbic acid syrup to the puree for each banana used. To make ascorbic acid syrup, dissolve ¼ teaspoon of ascorbic acid (vitamin C) powder and ½ cup of sugar in 2 cups of water. Ascorbic acid powder can be purchased at drugstores and some markets.

To dry bananas, peel and slice the ripe bananas lengthwise. Dip the slices in orange juice or ascorbic acid syrup to prevent discoloration. Place on drying trays in the sun or in a drying oven with the cut surfaces up. Protect the drying banana slices from insects by putting a screen over them.

Food Uses

Fully ripe bananas may be used in fruit cups, salads, desserts, and drinks. Mashed ripe bananas are easily digested and are one of the first solid foods given to infants.

Some varieties of the dessert banana can be eaten green. They are boiled in salted water, with the peel on or off, for 15 or 20 minutes and served hot as a starchy vegetable.

The male flowers or "blossoms" of the banana plant are also edible. They are used as vegetables and may be added to mixed dishes, stews, soups, and salads.

Fruit Sloop

- 1 ripe banana, peeled
- 1 apple, peeled
- Juice from 1 lemon
- 1 c. diced pineapple, fresh or canned
- 1 c. fruit juice (unsweetened orange, apple, or guava nectar)
- 1 c. unflavored low-fat yogurt or buttermilk
- 2 T. honey

1. Combine all ingredients in blender. If desired, thicken with more bananas. If the mixture is too thick, additional fruit juice or club soda can be added to each glass.
2. Add crushed ice or chill.
3. Pour into tall glasses and serve as a drink or serve in bowls as a soup.
4. Spice drinks with a dash of nutmeg.
5. Garnish soup with a thin slice of lime or a sprinkling of chopped peanuts. Yield: 4 servings.

Banana Blossom Salad

- 3 c. banana flowers, sliced
 - 1 T. ginger, thinly sliced
 - 1 clove garlic, minced
 - 1 c. sliced onion
 - ½ to 1 c. cider vinegar
 - 2 T. sugar
 - 1 t. salt
- Dash of pepper
Green onions and tomatoes for garnish

1. Slice the banana flowers in half-inch pieces and wash to remove the sticky white sap. Set aside. (If the banana flowers are mature they may be slightly bitter. Parboiling for several minutes reduces the bitterness.)
2. Saute ginger in oil for 1 minute.
3. Add garlic and onions, and stir for 1 minute until onions are limp.
4. Add vinegar, sugar, salt, and pepper, and bring to a boil.
5. Add the banana flowers and stir for 3 to 5 minutes, or until done.
6. Garnish with sliced green onions and tomatoes.
7. Chill before serving. Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

Other Uses

Banana leaves can be used as a wrapping for leis and food to provide temporary protection. When cut into strips, banana leaves can be woven into baskets, hats, and mats.

The rotted trunk may be used as fertilizer or humus. The stalk, after harvesting, may be cut, crushed, and used as feed for livestock.

For More Information

Miller, Carey D., Katherine Bazole, and Mary Bartow. 1965. *Fruits of Hawaii*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.

References

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