



Bananas

If undelivered please return to the Mediae Company, P.O. Box 215- 00502, Karen, Kenya.

Growing bananas as a business

Banana is a staple food in Uganda. It is a perennial crop, meaning it produces fruit all year round.

Bananas have several uses. These include food, beverages (soft and alcoholic), animal feed and industrial spirits.

Ecological requirements

Bananas grow well under the following conditions:

Altitude	Both low and high altitudes are favourable
Temperature	Banana grow best in warm humid climate with temperature range of 20 - 30 °C
Rainfall	1500-2500mm rain per year which is well distributed over the year
Soil	Deep, fertile, well-drained loam soil with high humus content. Banana grows best in soil with a pH range of 5.6-7.5. It doesn't tolerate acidic soil. The crop needs an adequate supply of potassium, nitrogen, magnesium, calcium and phosphorus.

Can you afford to start a banana business? Do you need a loan?

If you do not have enough money to cover the start-up expenses of your business, you may need to borrow money. Talk to banks and SACCOs. Some loans you can pay back using your mobile phone. Remember that loans are not free. You will have to pay back your loan with **interest**.

Choosing a site and variety to grow

Select a place where bananas have not been grown before in your farm.

There are three main kinds of banana plants in East Africa:

- **The East African Highland Banana:** these are the most popular in the region especially in Uganda. They include the cooking type (*matoke*) and the brewing type (*mbidde*). They lo
- **The plantain:** The roasting banana or *gonja* is mostly grown in the highlands of Kasese in Uganda.
- **The cultivars of the East African coast:** these include the edible *sukalindizi* dessert banana eaten ripe, *kisubi* a brewing type, *kayinja* also a brewing type and *kivuvu* a cooking and brewing type.



Land Preparation

- Before the onset of the rains, prepare the land well by ploughing and harrowing to a fine tilth. Remove all weeds.
- Start by slashing the vegetation. Dig it into the soil. This will help the soil's fertility.
- Plough two times. This will provide a good seed bed for your crop.
- Create drainage channels along the contours. This will help reduce soil erosion.



Propagating

Use tissue culture bananas to get a good harvest. They are:

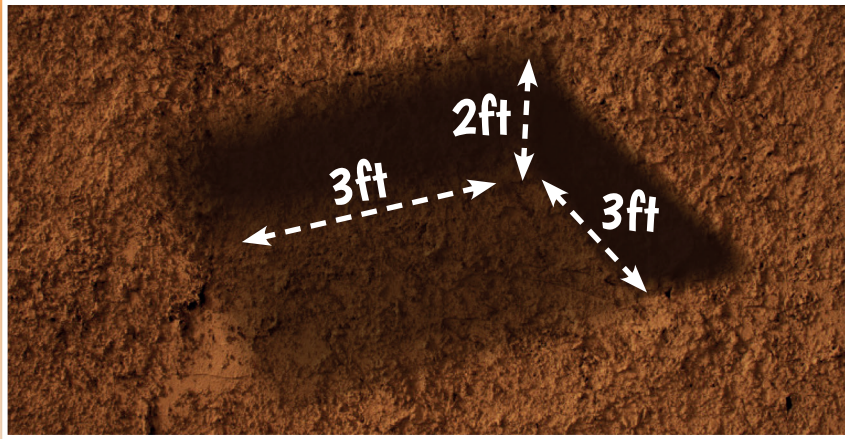
- True to type
- Healthy
- Good quality and high yielding
- Grow fast and uniformly
- Diseases free

Buy tissue culture bananas from a **UCDA** accredited supplier.



Planting bananas

- Dig the holes (3ft X 3ft X 2ft).



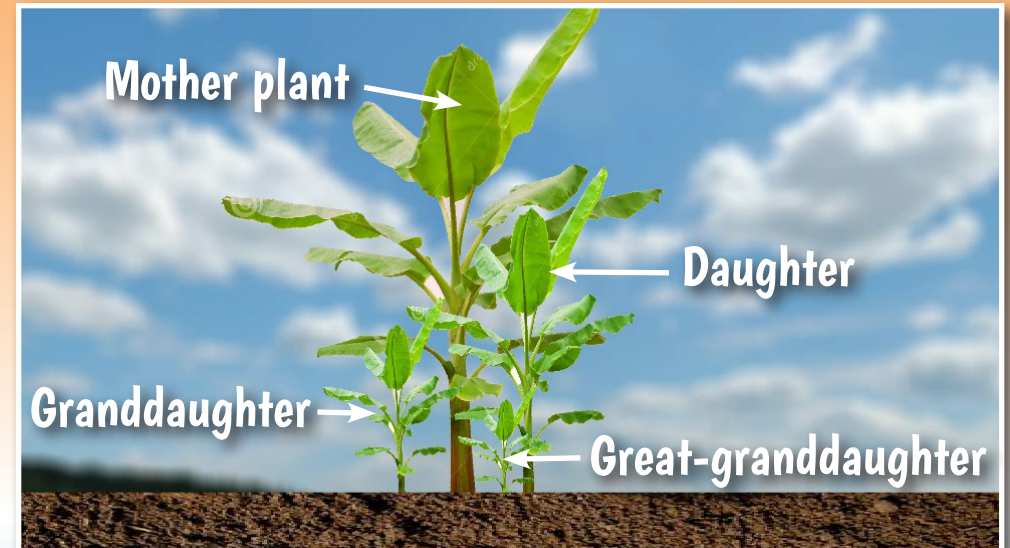
- The spacing depends on the variety. On average, spacing is 3m x 3m for short varieties & 4m x 4m for tall varieties.
- Rows should be in straight lines. If your farm is on a hillside, planting should be done along the contours. This will reduce soil erosion.
- As you dig the hole, separate the topsoil from the subsoil.
- Mix 1 bucket of well-rotten manure and 150 - 200g of fertilizer like **DAP** or **TSP** with the soil.
- Fill back the hole with the above mixture then followed by the subsoil.
- Split the polythene paper pot holding each seedling while holding the soil carefully. Using your hand or a simple garden tool such as a panga, make a smaller hole in the soil mixture at the bottom of the hole in the middle of the hole.
- Plant the seedling in the middle of the hole.
- Use your hands to press the soil down. This will help to hold the plant firm in the soil.
- Mulch the seedling with dry grass.
- Water every week.

Banana should be planted in blocks rather than in strips so that the plants give each other self-protection since they are highly susceptible to wind damage.

Banana Management

Desuckering

- You should only have 4 trees in each stand. They should be of different ages in a hold i.e. mother, daughter, granddaughter and great granddaughter.
- Extra suckers should be removed as soon as they are spotted.



Fertilizer application

- Bananas absorb a lot of nutrients from the soil.
- Put 1 wheelbarrow of manure twice a year per tree (during the short rains and the long rains). Use a short forked hoe to carefully mix the manure. Make sure you don't cause any root damage.
- Topdress with 250-300grams of CAN each year. Apply it in a 15cm ring around the stool.. Bananas need a lot of Potash. Apply 200 -300g/stool split 3 times in the year.

Weeding

- Weeds take water and nutrients from your crop. They also hide pests and diseases.
- Remove weeds by hoeing, using a herbicide or slashing. If hoeing, do not dig deep so as not to harm the roots.

Mulching

- Put heavy mulch cover to suppress unwanted weed growth, retain moisture, and provide humus for a good soil structure. You can use grass or banana leaves.

Pruning and Staking

Pruning helps you to get bigger and higher quality bunches. It also helps you manage sucker growth.

- Dead leaves should be removed at least twice a year.

Stake your fruit to prevent any breakage caused by heavy bunches.

-Stake with a wooden forked pole. Dig a hole 40-60cm deep at the base of the stem to install the prop.

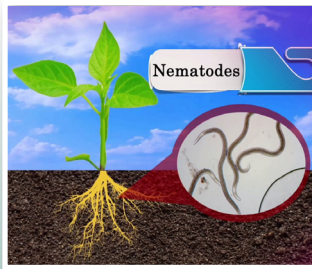
- Tie the banana bunch to the prop, near the portion where the fruit stalk emerges from the stem, or as shown in the image.



Pests and Diseases



Weevils make tunnels in the stems so that the plants fall. Cut the harvested stem into small pieces so that they quickly dry and do not attract the weevils.



Nematodes attack the roots. To stop nematodes, use a nematicide powder at planting, remove infected stems and do not intercrop bananas with maize, cowpeas or sorghum.



Cigar end rot is a fungal disease which makes the tips of fruits (banana fingers) look like the ash on the end of a cigar, hence the name.

Banana Bacterial Wilt (BBW) is a bacterial disease that is very destructive. Signs include, dull yellow wilting leaves, yellow puss oozing from cut stem and uneven ripening when the bunch is still young.

Signs of Bacterial Wilt



To control:

- Use disease-free planting materials
- Remove male bud with a forked stick immediately the last cluster has formed.
- Use clean planting materials. Disinfect tools with fire or *Jik*.
- Cut and heap/bury infected plants.

Harvesting

• Bananas are ready for harvesting after about 12-15 months. However, maturity depends on the variety.

• The fruit is cut down from the banana tree when mature. The color of the fruits when ripe varies among varieties. For some varieties especially *matoke*, the colour remains green but for the beer and dessert varieties, the color turns yellow.

• Harvest your banana bunches with a curved knife, or a sharp panga. You will need to cut the bunch stem carefully.

• Average yields of bananas are 1000 – 1200 bunches per hectare/annum under medium husbandry practices and 1250 bunches under excellent husbandry practices.

• Care should be taken to prevent the fruits from being bruised.

Post-harvest management

• Bananas cannot be stored for long as they get ripe and rot after a short time. After harvesting they must be marketed quickly. They must also be protected from direct sun, which hastens the ripening process.


Transport your bananas properly to avoid any losses. Poorly transported produce will get damaged and you will not get a good price at the market.



For more information on Bananas

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