

Sweet Banana, *mawz*

GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: fast growing
Humidity	: very humid, extremely humid
Propagation	: division
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: vulnerable
Dessication	: vulnerable
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: high
Salinity/ppm	: low (1000 ppm)
Hardiness	: 0°C

SHAPE

Type	: shrub, perennial
Height	: 1.5 m-3 m
Spread	: 1.5 m-2.5 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: yellow
Period	: January - December
Smell	: scented, strong, fruit, sweet, fruity

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: berry
Fruit size	: 9 cm - 15 cm
Toxicity	: edible when processed

The Sweet Banana, or mawz in Arabic, is one of the world's largest herbaceous plants, which most people would consider a tree. In fact, the 'trunk' consists of combined leaf stalks, usually between 2 and 6 metres high. They are hybrids between two wild species, *Musa balbisiana* and *Musa acuminata*. Both parents originate from humid, tropical Asia where the hybrid's cultivars 'Dwarf Cavendish' and 'Grand Nain' still make an important cash crop just as they do in tropical America. The only way to propagate Sweet Bananas is by separating their offshoots. After flowering and fruiting, the shoot dies and is followed by new sprouts. In time, a single banana grows into a stout, decorative clump. Its huge leaves may become 2.7 metres in length and 60 cm wide. Wind easily splits the spade along its veins, resulting in a frond-like appearance. They look best in locations protected from wind. The flowerbud resembles a purple heart that opens up numerous tubular florets between bracts. Along the hanging cluster, tiers are grown with up to 20 fruits each. These bunches are called 'hands', while the individual, yellow fruits are known as 'fingers'. Since the banana plants are of tropical descent, they grow flowers and fruit at any time of the year. Commercial growers fear the Panama disease, a fungal infection (*Fusarium*) that attacks the roots. It is no serious hazard to private gardens or public parks where Sweet Bananas are often grown for their ornamental effects. Not frost-hardy, they are often seen in protected areas on farms.

