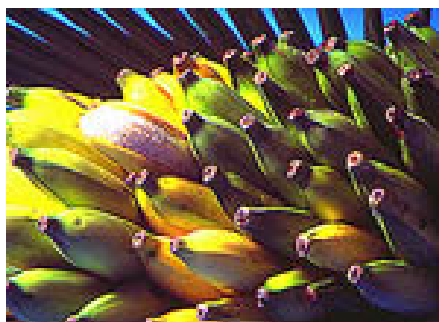


Florida Food Fare

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Bananas

Description: The very first banana grew in Southeast Asia about a million years ago. They have been grown in scattered locations throughout Florida since their introduction during the 16th century. Limited commercial production has occurred since the late 1800s. Florida is considered a climatically marginal area for commercial banana production due to the subtropical climate and occasional freezes. There are hundreds of banana species, including the short chunky red banana, dwarf or finger banana, the apple flavored Manzano, and the Cavendish. The most commonly available variety in the supermarket is the Yellow Cavendish because it has more fruit and a thinner peel, while common dooryard varieties include Dwarf and Manzano. Bananas mature in about 15 months. Each stem produces fruit only once. The exotic purple flower on the end of the stem opens into clusters of tiny blossoms. Every blossom grows into a single banana. Each bunch of bananas is made of about 25 hands. Each hand contains 10 to 12 individual bananas or fingers. The entire bouquet produces a stem of about 250 to 300 bananas.

Availability: Bananas are available year round in the grocery store. Unlike most other fruit, they are best when harvested green and allowed to ripen in the supermarket or at home.

Nutritional Value: Bananas are the perfect snack food. They are low in sodium and fat and rich in potassium and contain small amounts of other necessary vitamins and minerals. One small banana, approximately 100 g contains 92 calories, 23 g carbohydrates, 2.4 g dietary fiber, and 1 g sodium. It also yields 400 mg potassium, 1 g protein, 9 mg vitamin C, 6 mg calcium, 19.2 mcg folate, 81.8 IU vitamin A, and 29.2 mg magnesium.

Selection and care: Choose bananas that are plump and free from bruises. Depending on when and how you plan to use them, bananas can be purchased green, yellow with green tips or yellow with tiny brown spots. If bananas need further ripening, keep them out at room temperature a few days. For speedy ripening, enclose in perforated brown paper bag. To store bananas for a longer time, keep them in the refrigerator. The peel will darken but the fruit inside will remain ripe and fresh. Bananas will keep longer in the freezer. Just mash the fruit with a little lemon juice and freeze in an airtight container. Use within 6 months. Banana slices can also be dehydrated and stored for later consumption.

Preparation and Use: Bananas are a favorite for fresh eating. They can also be used in fruit cups, salads, drinks, desserts, pies, and baked goods. When using fresh, to avoid discoloration, brush the fruit with lemon juice or orange juice. When the banana is green tipped and the pulp is firm and starchy it may be cooked, baked, boiled or fried. When the peel is all yellow with only a small trace of green, 80% to 90% of the starch has been changed to sugar. Flecked with brown, the fruit is mellow, sweet and tender and practically all starch has been changed to sugar. Very ripe, soft, bananas are often used for banana breads and muffins.

Recipes:

Banana Bread with Applesauce

2 1/2 cups all purpose flour	1 cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder	3 egg whites
1 teaspoon baking soda	2 cups mashed ripe bananas (4 large)
1 teaspoon cinnamon	1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup natural applesauce	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spray an 8x4x3" loaf pan with non-stick cooking spray. Sift flour, baking powder, soda and cinnamon and set aside. In large mixing bowl, mix applesauce, sugar, egg whites, banana and vanilla. Add flour all at once and stir gently to blend. Pour into prepared pan and bake for 50-60 minutes or until knife inserted into center comes out clean. Cool completely before slicing. Freezes well for up to 2 months.

Fruit Salad with Lemon Yogurt Dressing

1 8-ounce carton low fat lemon yogurt	2 cups cubed cantaloupe
1 tablespoon lemon juice	1 cup sliced strawberries
1 tablespoon honey	1 banana, sliced
1 kiwifruit, peeled , sliced	

In a small bowl, combine yogurt, lemon juice and honey. Blend well, cover and refrigerate. In large bowl combine kiwifruit, cantaloupe and strawberries. Cover and refrigerate until serving time. Just before serving, add sliced banana. Top each 2/3 cup serving of fruit mixture with 2 tablespoons yogurt dressing. Serves 6.

Banana Waldorf Salad

1 red apple, unpared	1 tablespoon orange juice
1/2 cup celery diced	2 ripe bananas
1/4 to 1/2 cup walnuts, broken	Salad greens, as desired
1/4 cup reduced fat mayonnaise	

Wash, core and dice unpared apple. Combine with celery, nuts, mayonnaise and orange juice. Peel banana and slice about 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick. Fold bananas carefully into apple mixture. Serve on crisp lettuce or other salad greens. Just before serving, garnish with sprigs of watercress or parsley.

Breakfast in a Glass – Banana Smoothie

1 banana peeled	1/3 cup non-fat milk
1/4 cup strawberries, washed and sliced	1 (8 oz.) container non-fat plain or vanilla yogurt

Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.