‘Fiji’ Banana

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Background

The ‘Fiji’ variety of banana plant is originally from the island of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands, where it is considered a local variety (Nandwani *et al*. 2010). It arrived in Guam approximately 40 years ago. It is classified as a dessert banana as it produces a sweet fruit.

Description

Three distinguishing characteristics of ‘Fiji’ plants are:
1) rapid growth
2) a brief period from flowering to harvest, and
3) a tolerance to local insect pests and diseases.

The time from planting to flower emergence is seven months. At flowering, the trunk is seven feet tall. The fruit becomes ready for harvest 90 to 100 days, or about three and a half months, after flowering. This is a much shorter period than other banana varieties, such as ‘Saba’ (Dela Cruz *et al*. 2008).

Each plant can produce a bunch that can weigh 15 to 40 pounds. The number of hands in a bunch is six to 10. The number of fingers in a hand ranges from 12 to 16. The fingers are rounded and are yellow when ripe. They are small and have a thin skin. The flesh is white and sweet.

Nomenclature

The scientific designation (Nandwani 2009) for this variety, or cultivar, is *Musa* spp. (AAB Group) ‘Mysore.’ It is possible ‘Fiji’ is grown in other areas of the Pacific and Asia but known by a different name.

Propagation and harvesting

Banana plants only bear fruit once and then new plants, or suckers, emerge from the base of the mother plant. Bananas are propagated vegetatively by removing these suckers from the mother plant to be used as planting

Figures 1. ‘Fiji’ bananas growing at the UOG Inalåjan agInnovation Station. *Photo by Roberto Diaz Pulgar*

Figures 2. 'Fiji' bananas growing at the UOG Inalåjan agInnovation Station. *Photo by Roberto Diaz Pulgar*

material. The preferred type of suckers are called "sword" suckers. Separating suckers from the mother plant also ensures that the plant produces a larger bunch.

For more instruction on propagation, harvesting, and handling, please reference "A Guide to Growing Bananas in Guam" at www.uog.edu/publications/ceo.

Uses and recommendations

'Fiji' has the potential of becoming a popular dessert banana in Guam. The plants produce an attractive yellow fruit that is sweet and is eaten as a fresh fruit.

'Fiji' is an excellent candidate for commercial and backyard production in Guam. Its rapid growth, quick maturity, and tolerance to pests and diseases are very desirable traits.

At present, consumers in Guam prefer two local dessert bananas — 'Manila' and 'Macao' — but these varieties are slow-growing and very susceptible to diseases. 'Fiji,' on the other hand, is quick to produce and is tolerant of diseases. 'Fiji' should be promoted as a replacement for these older, poor performing dessert bananas.

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