

'Saba' Banana

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Agriculture & Natural Resources Program

Fact Sheet EXT-04-2025

Background

'Saba' is a common banana variety in Guam. It is originally from the Philippines (Nandwani et al. 2010) and was brought to Guam during the Spanish colonial period. It can be considered both a cooking and a dessert type of fruit. Thus, 'Saba' is a versatile banana that can be used in many ways.

Description

Four distinguishing features of 'Saba' plants are their vigorous growth, robust size, disease resistance, and tolerance to adverse conditions, such as droughts and flooding.

The time from planting to flower emergence is seven months. At flowering the trunk is eight feet tall. The fruit becomes ready for harvest 90 to 120 days after flowering. Each plant can produce a bunch that can weigh 25 to 50 pounds. A bunch can have eight to nine hands, each hand typically having 14 fingers. The fingers are distinctively squarish and angular. The flesh is white and starchy.

Nomenclature

The scientific designation (Crichton et al. 2016) for this variety, or cultivar, is *Musa acuminata x balbisiana* (ABB Group) 'Saba.' A synonym sometimes used in Guam is 'Palau.'

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 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.



Figures 1. 'Saba' bananas growing at the UOG Inalâjan agInnovation Station. Photo by Roberto Diaz Pulgar



Figures 2. 'Saba' bananas growing at the UOG Inalâjan agInnovation Station. Photo by Roberto Diaz Pulgar

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

Uses

'Saba' bananas figure prominently in island cooking. They are remarkably versatile in that they can be considered both a cooking banana and a dessert banana. The fruit can be eaten raw, boiled, fried, steamed, or cooked in coconut milk. A dish growing in popularity is banana lumpia.

The male inflorescence or banana heart, locally known as *fafalo*, can be prepared as a vegetable. It can be purchased in local supermarkets and the flea market in Dededo.

The sturdy and hardy nature of 'Saba' also enables it to be used as a windbreak where it provides shelter for crops like papaya.

Recommendations

'Saba' is highly recommended for commercial and backyard growers in Guam. Its vigorous growth, disease resistance, tolerance to adversity, and the fact that it can be used both in cooking and as a dessert make this a very valuable and desirable crop for island producers.

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