



## November 2017 – Bananas



## Who we are and what we do:

The Bonita Springs Tropical Fruit Club, Inc., is an educational not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to inform, educate and advise members and the public in the selection of tropical and subtropical fruiting plants and trees, to encourage their cultivation, and to provide a social forum where members can freely exchange plant material and information. The club cooperates with many organizations, and provides a basis for producing new cultivars. We function in any legal manner to further the above stated aims.

**Meetings:** Regular membership meetings that include an educational program are held the **second** Tuesday of each month. Meetings begin with a tasting table at 6:45 PM followed by a program at 7:15 PM, at the First United Methodist Church, 27690 Shriver Avenue, Bonita Springs. The meetings are held in the "Fellowship Hall" meeting room.

**Workshops:** Workshops (monthly discussions) are held on the **fourth** Tuesday of each month. This open format encourages discussion and sharing of fruits and information. Bring in your fruits, plants, seeds, leaves, insects, photos, recipes, etc. This is a great chance to get answers to specific questions, and there always seems to be a local expert on hand! The workshops begin at 7pm and are also held at the First United Methodist Church, 27690 Shriver Avenue, Bonita Springs, in the "Fellowship Hall" meeting room.

## Directions:

From the intersection of Old 41 Road and Bonita Beach Road SE, proceed north to Dean Street. Turn right on Dean St. and go two blocks to Shriver, then turn left on Shriver and go two blocks to the Methodist Church. Free parking on both sides of the street. Shriver is parallel to Old 41, two blocks East.

**Tree sale:** An annual spring tree sale at Riverside Park in downtown Bonita Springs raises revenue for educational programs for club members and other related purposes of the club.

**Trips:** The club occasionally organizes trips and tours of other organizations that share our interests. The IFAS Experimental Station, the Fruit and Spice Park, and the Fairchild Nursery Farm are examples of our recent excursions.

## Membership:

Dues are \$15 per individual, \$25 per household per year. Nametags, if needed, are \$6 each. Send checks to: PO Box 367791, Bonita Springs, FL 34136, or bring to any regularly scheduled meeting.

**Newsletter:** This newsletter is available to anyone via website and email, and to paid members via post office mail upon request.

## Officers and Board of Directors:

President: Suzy Valentine

Vice President: Kathy Pflugrad

Secretary: Anna Bailey

Treasurer: Victoria Strickland

Asst. Treasurer: Melrose John

Director: Berto Silva

Director: Crafton Clift

Director: Rickford John

Email us at [Info@BonitaSpringsTropicalFruitClub.com](mailto:Info@BonitaSpringsTropicalFruitClub.com).

## Guest Speaker for November:

Our speaker on November 14th, 2017  
will be Dr. Steve Brady

The program originally scheduled for September was rescheduled for November 14 due to the hurricane. Dr. Steve Brady will speak about avocados.



Steve is a retired internist who planted his first fruit seeds at age six. He's been growing and collecting tropical fruits ever since and amassed a collection of 600 fruiting trees and plants on his two acres in Naples. He specializes in truly rare fruits collected from around the world and has been a great asset on the Collections Committee of Naples Botanical Garden.

Dr. Brady will share his new presentation on "Avocados" with us. His information is sure to be timely and practical. Facing the new threat from laurel wilt, we can all use additional education on growing this popular fruit. Come expand your knowledge.

## Announcements:

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The Clewiston trip to Sugar and Citrus Industries has been **cancelled** due to lack of sufficient participation. If you signed up and paid, our Treasurer will reimburse you.

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**SEEKING CLUB OFFICERS**-- As our club bylaws require, **at the November 14 meeting** a call will be made for members willing to run for election. Offices include president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and directors. Begin thinking now which leadership role you can serve in for 2018 and be ready to put your hand up so that we can add your name to the ballot for the January 9 election.

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## Calendar of Club Events

11/14 Tue. –Regular Meeting, 6:45 PM

11/28 Tue. –Workshop Meeting, 7:00 PM

12/12 Tue. -Christmas Party, 6-8 PM - details to be announced

12/26 Tue. –**No** Workshop

## Chores Outdoors: November Edition

### PERSIMMONS

Take time to fertilize your persimmons with a balanced fertilizer, preferably an organic 6-6-6 or 10-10-10 even with fruit not yet harvested. Remember, persimmons lose their leaves this time of the year; keep applying the fertilizer lightly each month until the first new leaves start to push. Then stop fertilizing because once the leaves are pushing, fertilizer will send a signal for no fruit to set or the set fruit to abort. 'Triumph' is our favorite persimmon—good flavor and regular fruiting. There are many other good persimmons; test and try before you buy!

### MORINGA

We are learning more and more about the health benefits of moringa. It grows well here and is drought tolerant once established. Propagation is by seed or cuttings or air layers. It can be grown successfully in a large pot or in the ground. Shape it as it grows, harvesting the top of the tree—then it will bush out and the leaves, flowers and pods will be easy to reach. Moringa trimmings are excellent green fertilizer under fruit trees. There are many good library books and online information about the benefits of moringa. Moringa prospers in well drained, sandy soil, and will stress and die in wet soil. A young tree will probably die at 32° F, a mature tree struggles at 28° F. Moringa grows at a fast rate, so needs to be topped or pruned regularly. When young fertilize with a little Peters 20-20-20 (follow instructions) and a light sprinkle of cotton seed meal, which is the only nutrition needed when mature because Moringa thrives in acid conditions.

### STRAWBERRIES

This is the time to plant strawberries. See full instructions in the *September 2016* newsletter.

Everyone make sure to give a big thanks to David and Jenny Burd for providing us our *Chores Outdoors This Month* tips for each month. Thanks guys.

## Fruit of the Month — Bananas

**Scientific Name:** *Musa acuminata*

**Family:** Muscaceae

Although bananas are the most eaten tropical fruit in America, the average person fails to understand their uniqueness. To start with, banana trees aren't really trees; they are large herbaceous plants with mature heights of five to thirty feet with leaves several feet long. Each banana plant bears just one stalk of fruit in its lifetime. New plants don't grow from seed, but sprout from the underground rhizomes of the mother plant. These "pups" grow up to produce the next generation of fruit. The fruit is produced without pollination, meaning bananas are parthenocarpic.



Four varieties of bananas. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

Bananas have a unique flowering process, as well. After a tree has produced a sufficient number of leaves, an inflorescence known as a "banana blossom" emerges from the heart of the plant and hangs downward on a stout stock. This large teardrop shaped bud is composed of tightly clustered maroon bracts. Each day one or more bracts fold back to reveal a row of flowers. In the outer layers, these are female, and each tubular flower develops into a banana. At the bud's center, the flowers are hemaphroditic, sterile and unfruitful. Later, as the bracts nearer the heart of the blossom open, male flowers are revealed. Some growers remove the remaining portion of the banana blossom after bananas cease to form. In Southeast Asia, where bananas originated, this banana blossom is often prepared and eaten as a vegetable.

Bananas have several advantages as a dooryard fruit. They bear relatively quickly—sometimes less than a year after planting, are capable of high yields in small spaces, and the harvest isn't confined to a particular season. These advantages seem to outweigh the disadvantages: banana plants can look sloppy as leaves are shredded by wind or die back and droop along the trunk, and certain cultivars are vulnerable to Panama and/or Black Sigatoka diseases. The plant can be destroyed with winds above 50 miles per hour or at temperatures below 30 degrees, but a new plant will sprout from the rhizome.

When choosing a location for bananas, it's wise to put them in a less obvious location unless you wish to trim off unattractive leaves regularly. An area with full sun and protection from strong winds is ideal.

Banana plants flourish with plenty of organic matter, water, and proper thinning. An easy way to achieve good results is to dig a trench three or four feet wide and at least two feet deep. Add a mixture of compost and soil to within about a foot of the top. Plant the banana plants spaced several feet apart. Add kitchen compost (e.g. fruit and vegetable peelings), grass clippings, etc. to the trench regularly and water frequently during dry periods. In addition to providing nutrients, this method accommodates successive generations as each tends to grow above the level of its predecessors. To maintain ongoing yields, excess pups need to be eliminated; in each clump leave a full size "tree," a half grown one, and one young pup.

Hundreds of banana cultivars exist. Choose disease resistant varieties. Namwa (aka Nam Weh) or Dwarf Namwa do very well in Southwest Florida, producing large bunches of delicious fruit. Orinoco are recommended for their cold tolerance, and will grow as far north as Georgia, though fruiting can be sporadic that far north. Hua Moa (aka Plantano Hawaiiiano) can be eaten fresh or cooked, making them a good substitute for plantains, which do not thrive in our region. Whichever cultivar you choose, once you've tasted bananas that are homegrown, you may never want to buy them at the grocery store again.

For more information: <http://going-bananas.com/index.htm> ,  
<http://www.fruitscapesllc.com/fruitBANANA.html>



Banana Blossom

Photo courtesy of Fruitscapes LLC





Banana Stalk with Hands

Photo courtesy of Fruitscapes LLC

## Using Bananas

Harvest your stalk of bananas with a machete when the fruit looks fully formed and begins to turn lighter green. Be careful to avoid bruising, and note that the sap from the cut stalk can permanently stain clothing.

Allow fruit to ripen at room temperature. Remember that many homegrown varieties may look overripe before they reach their most tasty stage. Of course, bananas are delicious eaten out of hand, over cereal, on toast, or in fruit salad. They can be frozen and run through a food processor with frozen berries or with cocoa powder for a delicious ice cream substitute, or added to fruit smoothies. Cakes, cookies, and banana bread are other uses.

Banana blossoms are a delicious addition to the diet when properly prepared. Search online for “banana blossom recipes”.



Banana stand

Photo courtesy of Fruitscapes LLC



Banana Plants growing back after Hurricane damage.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Pflugrad

Cover photo courtesy of Wikipedia.