

Banana

Harvesting

Bananas are harvested raw and ripened artificially. The dwarf bananas are ready for harvest within 11-14 months after planting, while tall cultivars take about 14-16 months to harvest. A bunch usually takes 90-120 days to mature after shooting, depending on climate and cultural practices. The maturity of banana is indicated by drying of top leaves, change in colour of fruits from dark green to light green and tendency of the floral end of the fruit to fall by slightest touch by hand. The mature fruit becomes plumpy and all the angles are filled in completely. When tapped the fruit gives metallic sound.

The method of harvesting depends on the height of the plant. Low growing varieties are harvested by cutting through the bunch stalk about 30-35 cm above the top hand. With taller varieties, the stem of the plant will be partly cut through to bring the bunch down within the harvester's reach.

Harvesting for Export

1. Irrigation of banana plantations should be stopped well in advance of the harvest date, preferably a week, so as to facilitate drying of the soil for movement of labour, harvesting, loading, etc.
2. Temporary sheds should be erected near banana fields and all operations such as cutting into hands, application of fungicidal paste should be carried out under the shade.
3. Bunches selected should be green, three-fourths ripe, whole, free from rubbing, scratching, bruises, sunburns or other blemishes. Bunches having malformed fingers, octopus-shaped hands, broken, torn or split fingers etc. should be rejected.
4. Three quarters full stage is recognized by sharp angularities of the fingers. In some banana growing countries, the bunches are marked with date and month as soon as the inflorescence is shot. Under irrigated conditions the variety 'Dwarf Cavendish' takes 99-107 days to reach three quarters full maturity.
5. 'Dwarf Cavendish' banana at three-fourths full maturity shows a pulp skin ratio of 1.35 to 1.40 under normal conditions and this gives a fairly accurate index of maturity.
6. For cutting (harvesting) the bunches, one cutter and one helper are required. The bunch should be cut in one stroke 20 cm to 25 cm above the first band or 7.5 cm to 10 cm from the tip of the fingers of the first hand. The helper should hold the same portion and place it carefully on the freshly cut leaves spread on the ground. The last hand is removed if undersized.
7. For carrying bunches to packing shed it is necessary that after 15 minutes of harvest, when the latex flow ceases, the bunches should be taken two at a time on stretchers and should not be allowed to come into contact with soil.

Yield

Varieties

Yield (t/ha)

a) Dwarf Cavendish

30-40

b) Robusta

38-45

c) Other varieties

20-30