

# IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

Volume: 2019 Issue: 12

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Lubbock County \* PO Box 10536 \* Lubbock, TX 79408  
 916 Main, Suite 401 Lubbock, TX 79401 \* 775-1740 \* Fax 775-1658 \* <http://lubbock.agrilife.org>

## The Benefits of Bananas

Bananas are a popular fruit for their convenience and sweet taste while also providing numerous health benefits! Historically bananas originated in Southeast Asia and eventually made their way to the Americas thanks to Spanish and Portuguese explorers. Bananas require a tropical climate for growth which explains why 94% of bananas consumed within the U.S. are grown in Central and South America.



### Speed Up or Decrease the Ripening Process

Bananas may be purchased while they are not fully ripe in hopes that they will have a longer shelf life. Sometimes however you may need to speed up this process if the fruit has not yet ripened and you are ready to use it. Here are two ways to speed up ripening:

- Place the green bananas in a paper bag and roll the top of the bag shut. The bananas produce ethylene gas naturally that will become trapped inside the bag. This gas will accelerate the ripening process.
- Place underripe and unpeeled bananas into an oven that is preheated to 350°F for approximately 20 minutes. Although the peel may turn completely black the inside flesh will be sweet and ready to eat!

On the other hand, if you are beginning to see that your bananas are ripening too quickly, and you want to slow down this process. Here are two ways to do this:

- Place the unpeeled banana into the refrigerator. Like the oven, the refrigerator will turn the peel a dark color however the cold air will help to keep the flesh of the fruit firm and slow down the ripening process.
- Wrap the stem of the banana bunch with plastic wrap. This helps to seal the stem from exposure to excess oxygen and can help slow the ripening process!

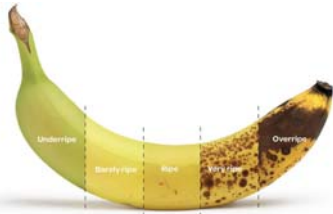
### What health benefits do bananas have to offer?

There are many nutrients found in bananas that help to promote general health. Here are a few examples:

- Bananas are rich in the mineral potassium that helps to regulate heartbeat and cardiac functioning. It also plays a role in maintaining fluid and electrolyte balance in the body and can help to reduce blood pressure.
- Vitamin B6 is found in bananas and is associated with hemoglobin which is responsible for transporting oxygen in the blood to every part of the body.
- Fiber is another great benefit found in bananas that can help to support good digestive health. The dietary fiber found in bananas can help to keep your bowels regular.
- Bananas also provide nutrients that have prebiotic qualities meaning they help nourish flora in the gut and promote the growth of good bacteria.

## How bananas can be used in the kitchen!

Starch degradation occurs as bananas ripen leading to an increase in sugar content and a decrease in starch and pectin levels. Ripening contributes to changes in taste and texture of the banana. Unripe bananas tend to have a firm waxy texture with a slightly bitter taste. As bananas ripen their texture begins to soften and they become increasingly sweeter. These unique changes allow the banana to be a diverse fruit at different stages of the ripening process. They can be prepared many different ways and used in many different types of recipes.



Ripeness	Cooking Uses
Underripe completely green	Cooked in stews and curries, or fried as a substitute for recipes that call for plantains
Barely Ripe greenish yellow	Raw, or cooked in stews and curries; mashed and fried as fritters; sautéed for desserts
Ripe completely yellow	raw in fruit salads; frozen; flambéed or sautéed for desserts
Very Ripe brown spots	Raw in fruit salads and smoothies; flambéed or sautéed; used in desserts or breads; frozen
Overripe completely brown	Mashed into shakes; made into bread, cakes, pancakes, or smoothies; frozen

## A few fun facts about bananas!

- Bananas grow upside down towards the sun giving them their curved shape
- Botanically a banana is both a fruit and a berry which is grown on a large herb and not a tree like many believe.
- The root of a banana plant can be hundreds of years old but the stem that rises above the ground is herbaceous and dies at the end of one-year cycle.
- A bunch of bananas is called a “hand,” and an individual banana is called a “finger.”
- A hand can weigh up to 100 pounds and one hand can actually have 400 fingers!

## Can bananas be used as a sugar substitute?

As mentioned before overripe bananas are very sweet and have a high sugar content. They can be mashed into a puree and used as a replacement for some or all of the sugar in dishes like banana bread, pancakes, or waffles! Since the banana is naturally sweet but also provides many other great nutrients this replacement makes the recipe more nutrient dense with lower calories and less added sugars! Try replacing ½ cup of sugar with ½ cup of pureed overripe banana with one of your favorite recipes to try it out! Bananas also make a great nutrient dense dessert! Below is a recipe for a very simply way to make banana ice cream at home!

### *Frozen Banana Ice Cream*

2 large ripe bananas (frozen)

Optional Add-in ingredients:

chocolate chips, almonds, Nutella, cocoa powder, peanut butter, almond butter, honey, peanuts

Instructions:

1. Peel two bananas and cut each into about 3-4 pieces.
2. Place the banana pieces in an airtight container or freezer bag and place in the freezer.
3. Allow the bananas to freeze for at least two hours or until they are solid. (Overnight works best)
4. Place frozen bananas into food processor and pulse for about 15-20 seconds or until frozen soft serve consistency.
5. You can add in many other additional ingredients and blend to try new flavors!
6. Once the mixture is blended well you will want to transfer the mixture into an airtight container and return it to the freezer to gain a more solid consistency. Once it is frozen it is ready to be served and enjoyed!

Note: Add milk for the right consistency.

Recipe Source:

<https://www.thekitchn.com/how-to-make-creamy-ice-cream-with-just-one-ingredient-cooking-lessons-from-the-kitchn-93414>

Resources:

- <https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/usda-nutrient-data-laboratory>
- <https://foodandnutrition.org/from-the-magazine/healthy-kitchen-hacks-banana-rescue/>
- <https://foodandnutrition.org/from-the-magazine/bananas-naturally-sweet-and-simple-fruit-enjoyed-around-the-globe/>
- <https://besthomecaretips.com/health-benefits-eating-bananas-elderly/>