

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**“All bananas” – a portrait of bananas (*Musa L.*)****The “Cretan” Banana (*Musa x paradisiaca*), strain “Dwarf Cavendish”**

Bananas (*Musa*) are a plant genus from the family *Musaceae*. There are around 100 species in genus "Bananas". Some species have edible fruits, where the genus *Musa x paradisiaca* is most cultivated for food production. The edible fruits are rich in various vitamins, minerals, sugar and dietary fibre.

In Europe successful growing is possible only in the warmest areas. Small cultivation areas on the continent of Europe are in the south of Peloponnesus (Greek) and in Portugal. Also bananas are harvested on the Canary Islands, Madeira, Cyprus and Crete (see fig.)



Contrary to popular opinion the small Cretan bananas (10 cm long) are also allowed to be sold in the EU.

The EU banana regulation [EC 2257 / 94] provides for a minimum length of 14 cm and thickness 27 mm, but it does not apply to the small banana varieties grown on Crete (and Madeira); there are specific rules for them. They may be smaller than the allowed minimum size; however, they than are automatically covered by class II.

The “Cretan banana” is in Crete cultivated in the area of Ierapetra and Malia (see fig. left and following page).

They are sold on roadsides, in supermarkets and weekly markets. The "small" banana actually tastes like each banana - she may be slightly sweeter and particularly fruity as the "world standard banana" due to the lower water content.

Musa species and varieties (-hybrid) are evergreen perennial plants. The of leaf sheaths existing hollow pseudostem and the spirally arranged leaves give a palm-kind look to the banana species. The simple, large, oval leaves are divided into leaf blade and petiole.

When a banana tree reaches an age of seven to nine months, grows a mostly down hanging inflorescence with red-purple bracts. At the bottom of each bract are flowers in a row; the hermaphrodite or unisexual flowers are zygomorphic and triad axes. The so-called "banana hand" with 10 to 20 bananas arranged finger equal is finally growing from each of these series. The banana fruits first grow down, but turn, after the drop of the bracts, towards the light, so that they occupy a curved shape. The fruits (which botanically belong to berries) vary greatly depending on the species and variety in size and colour; they are mostly falcate.

The bananas originally descend from the South-East Asian archipelago. 1502 Portuguese settlers founded the first plantations in the Caribbean and Central America.

In Crete, today mainly the varieties "Grand Nain" and "Williams" are cultivated; and of course the "pygmy eating banana" variety "Dwarf Cavendish"



The world's most important collection of *Musa* species and varieties is located on the Belgian University of Leuven. There all known forms of the genus *Musa* are preserved by in vitro cultivation and conserved for posterity.

For more info and pictures to bananas in Crete see our info sheet 26-04 on our homepage at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/026-04E.pdf]

or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musaceae> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banana>