

ដើមចេក

The Banana Tree

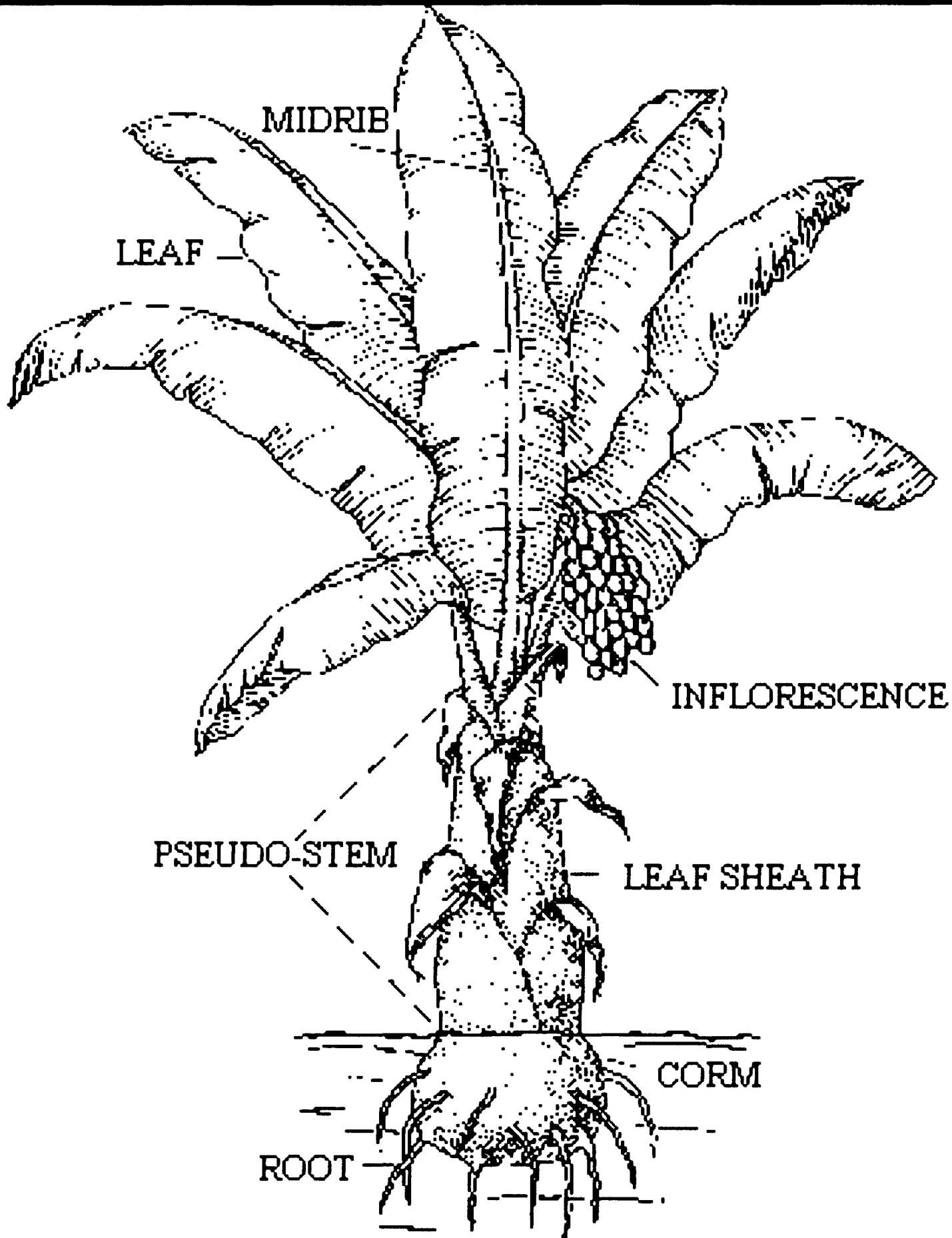
The banana “tree” is actually a plant native to Southeast Asia. It is an important food resource for many cultures in the region. The Cambodian banana, *Musa acuminata* (*cheik namva*), was domesticated over 8000 years ago. Every part of the plant is used, including its stalk, pulp, leaves, roots, and flowers. The flowering bulb or banana heart is used for salads. The stalks can be used to make rope and string. The shoots are used for soup and the leaves are used for wrapping foods for baking, grilling, or steaming. The stalks of the plant are buoyant in water and multiple stalks can be bound together to construct a raft. The non-stick surface of the outer shell of the stalk can be used for cooling caramel candy and children can make toys, such as poppers and whistles from it.

The banana plant also has medicinal properties. For example, the juice from the trunk is high in fiber and is used as an herbal remedy for stomach aches. The leaves have a non-stick quality making them ideal as bandages. They are placed on skin afflicted with measles or placed upon mattresses to soothe the injuries.

The banana plant is also used in religious and traditional ceremonies. The fruit is a favored offering in many rituals. The crown of the plant with its leaves is used as a religious object, known as *baysei*. Two banana plants with ripe fruit flank the entrance to weddings. One is painted gold and the other is painted silver. Stalk sections are used as incense holders.

This versatile and nutritious plant takes about two years to fruit and the fruit takes four months to ripen. Once the fruit has been picked, the stalk is cut and a new shoot will grow in its place.





Banana leaves are heated under sunlight before wrapping any baked goods.



Khmer cakes: num ansom chek and num kom wrapped with banana leaves.











