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The Banana Tree

The banana “tree” is actually a plant native to Southeast Asia. It is an important food source 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 float in water and multiple stalks can be bound together to make a raft. The non-stick surface of the outer shell of the stalk can be used for cooling and to make toys, such as poppers and whistles.



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.

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

The 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.