

Bunches & Bunches

How Bananas Grow in Rwanda

With TEACH Rwanda
Children & Teachers
3rd Edition



**TEACH
Rwanda**

Teacher Education and Children's Enrichment

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What do you wonder about— where and how bananas grow?

We live in Rwanda, some of us in houses just like these, so we see bananas get bigger every day! Come with us. We'll show you how bananas became one of our favorite foods—and much more!





First, bananas grow where the weather is always warm and it rains a lot. Rwandan weather and soil are perfect for growing bananas.

The Republic of Rwanda is in east central Africa. It is about the size of Haiti or the U.S. state of Maryland.

Rwanda is called the “Land of a Thousand Hills.” These are our families, walking along on their way to church in Rwinkwavu, in the Eastern Province.

Where do you see banana plants? They look like trees with giant leaves.





When you fly over Rwanda,
banana plants look like pinwheels!

Make your own paper pinwheels
with the directions in the back
of this book.

Here's a shiny banana leaf up close. Notice the veins. The slits along the edges look like fringe. These leaves are SO smooth to touch!



We asked farmers to explain how they grow bananas. Here's what they do.

First, the farmer digs a hole in the soil. Fertilizer, usually animal droppings, goes into the hole. Why do you think this hole is square?





Then the farmer finds a sucker. Where do suckers come from? *Suckers* are baby banana plants that grow next to a grown-up plant.

Farmers pry away the sucker from the big plant. They remove its leaves and trim its roots.



Next, the farmer puts the sucker into the hole, standing straight and tall. The farmer covers the sucker with soil.

Like all plants, bananas need sun, water, soil, and fertilizer to grow.
Farmers take good care of their plants, so they will grow tall.
We see them growing in fields like this one every day.





After about a year (yes, that's a LONG time) the banana plant sends out a flower.

Some bananas have stinky flowers. Others have flowers you can eat. Most bananas in Rwanda have flowers that are not for eating.

Where are the little bananas starting to grow in this picture?

These pictures show two other types of banana flowers.
Look for the bananas growing above them, too.



Here are bananas when they are a little bit bigger.
Bananas grow in bunches, one bunch on each plant.



The fruit grows for about 3 months before it is ready to pick. Some bananas stay green. Others turn yellow when they are ripe. Some ripe bananas are red, purple, or brown. Bananas can be pretty small (about the size of fingers), while others are much bigger.

In some countries, bananas used for cooking are called plantains. Which kinds of bananas do you like best?



When bananas are ready to harvest, farmers use sharp knives to cut down the whole bunch.

A bunch of bananas weighs about 70 kilos or 150 pounds.

You have to be strong to lift a bunch!

Look for the thick stem on the bunch this farmer is carrying.



In Rwanda, people haul bananas to market in several ways —on bicycles, in wheelbarrows, and even on top of their heads! Here are some farmers with bananas to sell.



Most Rwandan markets are outdoors. People, including mamas with babies on their backs, walk to market each day.



Bananas are usually sold in HUGE bunches, just like they grow.

What do Rwandans do with bananas and plant fibers?





We eat bananas just by shelling (peeling) them, of course.

We also cook bananas. You can boil them, cook them with rice and beans, or even fry them with sugar and butter. Which dishes have bananas in this picture?

Look for *yummy* recipes for bananas in the back of this book.

Some people make banana juice with a special kind of juice banana. People can also make beer and wine from this juice.



Banana leaves are great for art, too!

We enjoy painting flat, dry banana leaves at Bright School.

Dry banana leaves can also be cut into pieces to design cards, pictures, mosaics, and collages.

Just glue the bits on another dried banana leaf, cardboard, or thin piece of wood!



Rwandans also use banana fibers to make baskets, mats, decorations, and toys called galimotos.

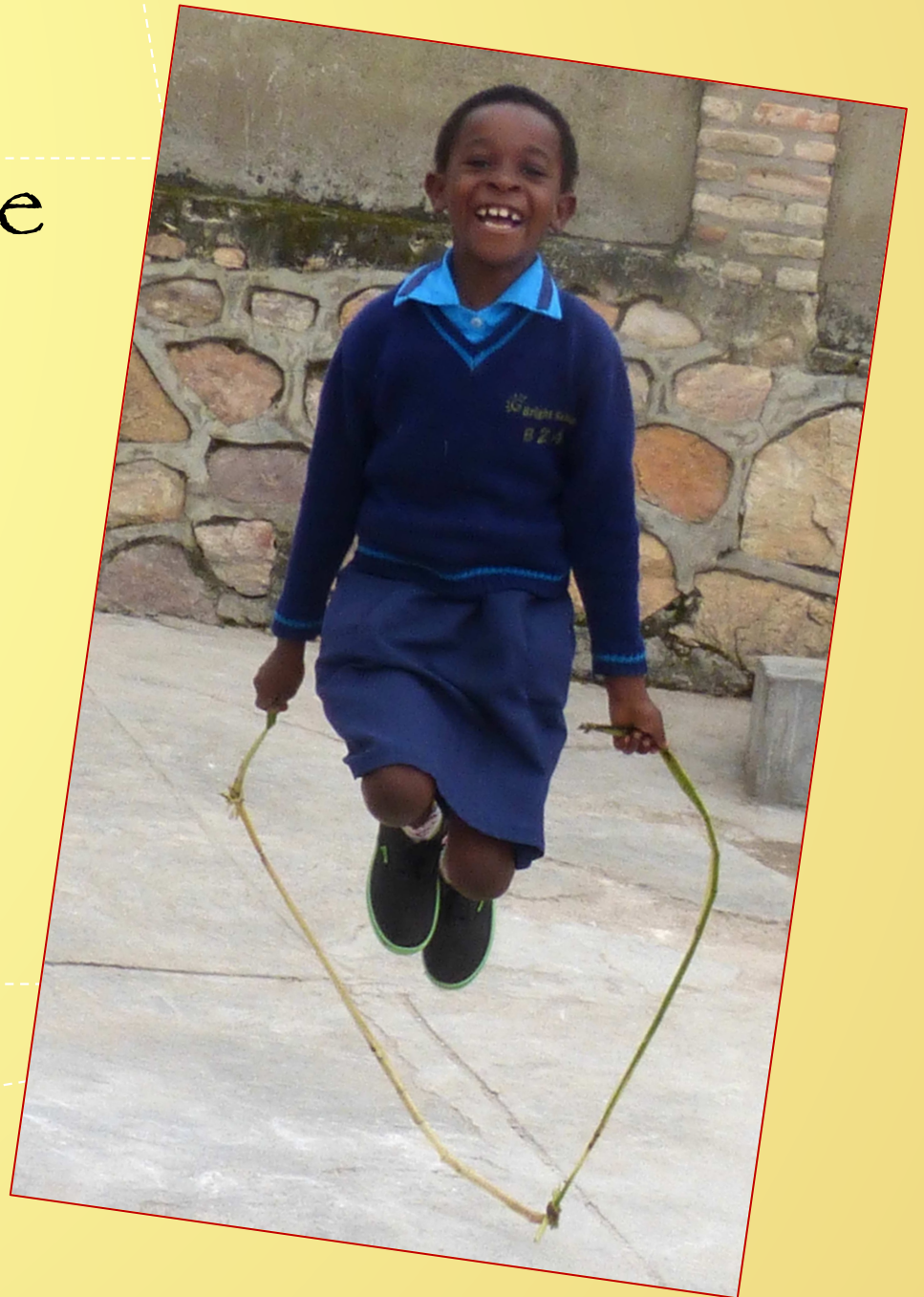


We use banana fiber—stems, leaves, bark—to make balls, jump ropes, handbags, and many other things to use in our homes and at school.





We love
to
jump
rope!





Here's a hat that farmers wear when they work in the hot sun. It's made from banana fiber, too.

Grownups make us dolls stuffed with banana fiber!
We love to carry these pretend babies on our backs,
just the way our mamas carried us when we were little.



Some bananas are shipped on boats or planes to other countries.
Rwanda doesn't have any seaports, so most of our bananas are eaten here.
We have the densest population in all of Africa.

Your bananas probably came from another tropical country—unless you live in Rwanda!



Recipes

These are some of our favorite recipes. What do you like to make with bananas? Share them with us on our TEACH Rwanda Facebook page!



Bananas, Rice, and Beans

Cook rice and beans in separate pans. Cut shelled bananas in half. Fry them in oil. Mix all three together. Add your favorite sauce, such as cooked tomatoes or peanut sauce.

Banana Stew

Shell green bananas. Put them in a pan of hot water. After a few minutes, add peanuts or beans.

Cook tomatoes in another pan with oil. Add onions and cook. Add this mixture to the pan with the bananas.

Banana Sandwiches

Spread bread with peanut butter and jelly. Shell a banana, slice it, and put it on top. Add a second slice of bread. Yummy!

Fried Green Bananas

Heat oil in a pan. When the oil is hot, shell the bananas, cut them in half, and fry them.

Boiled Green Bananas

Wash bananas in their shells. Cook them in hot water. Shell them before eating.

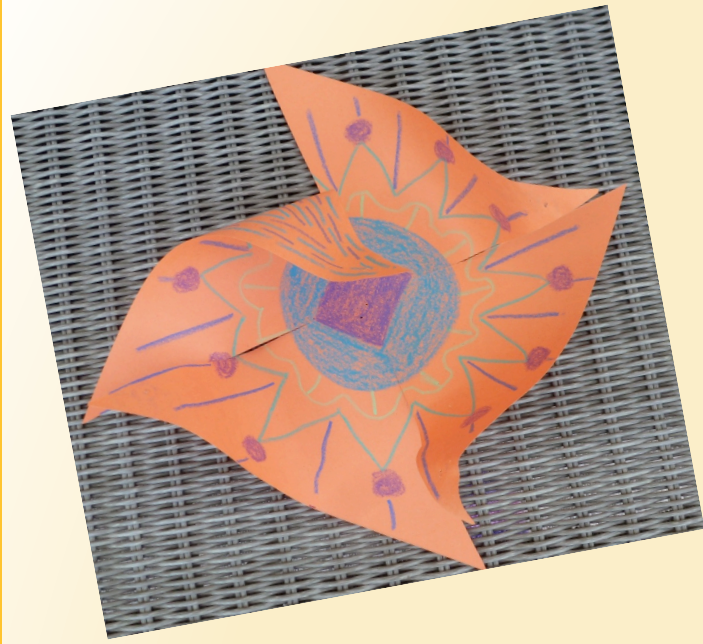
Dessert Bananas

Shell firm green bananas. Slice them lengthwise or in circles. Melt butter in a pan. Cook the bananas, turning them once, until they are soft. Add as much brown sugar and cinnamon as you like. Serve warm.

Art & Craft Projects

Try these ideas to remind you about bananas in Rwanda—
or invent your own creations!





Paper Pinwheels

Cut paper into a square. Fold the corners diagonally (so points touch each other) in both directions, to make an X. Unfold. Mark a coin-size section in the middle. Decorate both sides of the paper with crayons, paint, or markers.

Cut on the fold lines. Start at each point, but **STOP** cutting when you get to the middle section you marked.

Find a pencil with an eraser. Fold every other corner into the middle, one at a time (see the picture). Hold all four corners in place with your finger or glue them together. Press a pushpin, pin, or thumbtack through the center and into the eraser.

Your pinwheel looks a little like banana plants from an airplane. Blow to spin your pinwheel!

Banana Fiber Balls

Dry banana leaves. Form them into a ball. With a helper, wrap the outside in more leaves. Tie the ball together with banana fiber or twine. Sometimes we leave long, woven handles of banana fiber on our balls so we can kick them.

Banana Fiber Cards

Cut paper into a card. Cut dry banana leaves into little bits. Glue the shapes on the card to make a design.

Banana Fiber Dolls

Cut and sew a fabric doll body. Leave an opening along one edge. Sew on yarn for hair. Turn the doll inside out. Firmly fill the doll with dry banana fiber. Sew up the opening. Add yarn facial features, fabric-scrap clothing, and fun jewelry if you like.



The next time you eat a banana, think about us, learning in our TEACH Rwanda schools. We are surrounded by fields of bananas!

It takes many hands to raise bananas
—and to educate children well!





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