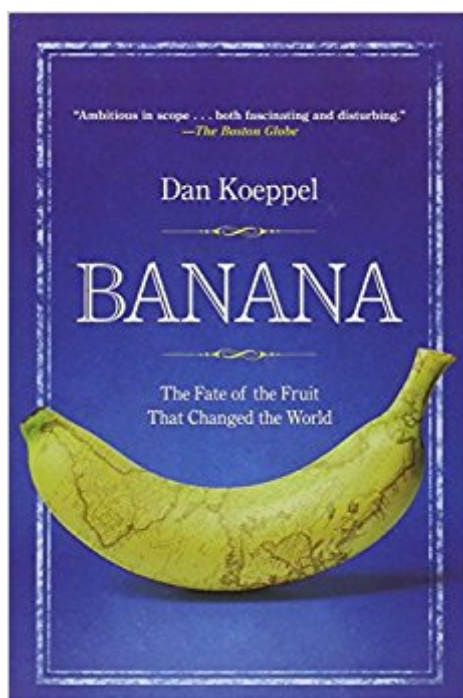


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# Banana: The Fate Of The Fruit That Changed The World



## Synopsis

In the vein of Mark Kurlansky's bestselling *Salt and Cod*, a gripping chronicle of the myth, mystery, and uncertain fate of the world's most popular fruit. In this fascinating and surprising exploration of the banana's history, cultural significance, and endangered future, award-winning journalist Dan Koeppel gives readers plenty of food for thought. Fast-paced and highly entertaining, *Banana* takes us from jungle to supermarket, from corporate boardrooms to kitchen tables around the world. We begin in the Garden of Eden—examining scholars' belief that Eve's "apple" was actually a banana—and travel to early-twentieth-century Central America, where aptly named "banana republics" rose and fell over the crop, while the companies now known as Chiquita and Dole conquered the marketplace. Koeppel then chronicles the banana's path to the present, ultimately—and most alarmingly—taking us to banana plantations across the globe that are being destroyed by a fast-moving blight, with no cure in sight—and to the high-tech labs where new bananas are literally being built in test tubes, in a race to save the world's most beloved fruit. Read Dan Koeppel's posts on the Penguin Blog.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The world's most humble fruit has caused inordinate damage to nature and man, and Popular Science journalist Koeppel (To See Every Bird on Earth) embarks on an intelligent, chock-a-block sifting through the havoc. Seedless, sexless bananas evolved from a wild inedible fruit first cultivated in Southeast Asia, and was probably the apple that got Adam and Eve in trouble in the

Garden of Eden. From there the fruit traveled to Africa and across the Pacific, arriving on U.S. shores probably with the Europeans in the 15th century. However, the history of the banana turned sinister as American businessmen caught on to the marketability of this popular, highly perishable fruit then grown in Jamaica. Thanks to the building of the railroad through Costa Rica by the turn of the century, the United Fruit company flourished in Central America, its tentacles extending into all facets of government and industry, toppling banana republics and igniting labor wars. Meanwhile, the Gros Michel variety was annihilated by a fungus called Panama disease (Sigatoka), which today threatens the favored Cavendish, as Koepfel sounds the alarm, shuttling to genetics-engineering labs from Honduras to Belgium. His sage, informative study poses the question fairly whether it's time for consumers to reverse a century of strife and exploitation epitomized by the purchase of one banana. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Required reading.” —New York Post “Ambitious in scope both fascinating and disturbing... I’ll never walk through the produce aisle the same way again” [Banana] is at once a political and economic treatise, a scientific explication, and a cultural history. “Clear, engaging, admirable” part historical narrative and part pop-science adventure. “San Francisco Chronicle” “[A] brilliant history.” —Seattle Post-Intelligencer “A fascinating and surprising history of our most ubiquitous fruit.” —Edward Humes, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Monkey Girl* and *Mississippi Mad* “The history of oil has nothing on that of the yellow fruit.” —Salon.com

I read some articles recently about the potential extinction of the banana and I went to get a better understanding of what is really going on. After reading this book, I know more about the banana, it's many varieties, and the blight of Panama disease that affects this food around the globe. I now know that a banana is technically an herb and that the ubiquitous Cavendish banana outsells every variety of apple and orange combined. Banana cultivation and trade has also had a significant impact on world history. I learned about all of that and more in this well-written, easy read of a book. Mission accomplished.

Told with the detail you need to understand the problem now facing our "favorite fruit". Pleasingly,

although it doesn't defend them, it is not a diatribe against Dole and Chiquita (ex United Fruit).

Narrative non-fiction, as a technique, appeals so directly to readers that it can be used to reveal the plight of almost any animal or plant, such as America's favorite fruit, as we find out in Dan Koeppel's, *Banana, The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World* (Plume, 2008.) Without this book who would know that this popular fruit is in danger of disappearing because of a disease? Koeppel does a great job presenting the overlooked history of a fruit common to our grocery stores and corner markets. Most of the book focuses on the single variety of banana available in North American and European supermarkets, and provides a good overview of different banana varieties used in Africa and Asia as local food staples, and how these varieties are threatened by plant diseases. The book also delves into the historical perspective of "Banana Republics," controlled and manipulated by the powerful banana corporations in the early-mid 20th and 21st Centuries. Koeppel's book illustrates the value of narrative non-fiction in presenting history and science at street level. As one reader remarked, "I learned more geography and science from this book than I did in high school, though I must say I wasn't the best of students. It proved to me that geography and science can be very interesting if they are put into a form that you understand," or "I picked this up on a lark, having enjoyed another micro history work on cotton. I never imagined I would be so interested in a book on bananas, but just a few pages in and I was hooked. Nice work." Other reviewers had high praise for the book and often were interested in the place in history of the banana and what the future holds. This is just one more example of the latest trend in contemporary popular science treatises, a trend that we hope continues for a long time.

The author does a fine job with this history of banana-business rivals United Fruit (now Chiquita) and Standard Fruit (now Dole). Interspersed with the details of corporate development are scientific details on the banana, the diseases that afflict it, the people that rely on it, the governments that are (or have been) ruled because of it and the issues it faces. Something I didn't know before I read this book: Bananas are not grown from seeds. Cuttings are taken from existing banana plants and nurtured into yet more banana plants from which cuttings will eventually be taken et cetera et cetera et cetera. The book would have benefited tremendously with the addition of more pictures and maps, plus a list of every known banana type and the odds of anyone getting his or her hands on one. Although the author mentions various banana varieties, he typically does not show you what they look like. Color plates of the top bananas (pun intended) along with their region of origin in the caption would have enabled a further grasp of how different some bananas really are from others.

That creamy purple Tahitian one is something I'd like to check out. Sounds tasty. Wish I knew what it looked like. At the end of the book, there is a short timeline of the banana and the people, countries and companies involved with its business or scientific development. All in all, very interesting and informative. Left me wanting more. As another reviewer complained, by the end of the book, you're really not sure how much longer the currently consumed (yet endangered) supermarket banana (the Cavendish) has before extinction. Maybe no one really knows. Worth a look if you've ever been curious about the banana.

I love bananas and wanted to know more about them. This book really opened my eyes about what makes a banana a banana, that there are SO many other types of bananas out there, and the issues currently plaguing the banana. Definitely a GREAT introduction to the world of bananas as there are SO many things going on with them that will probably surprise anyone who was like me when I first purchased this book - in love with bananas, but oh so ignorant of them.

This is a very insightful book on how two large corporations had their way with the governments and local populations in Central and South America. It's a look back at how business was and continues to be conducted in impoverished countries and how little regard is paid to the people who work for them. The element of corporate greed is so great that when the banana (Big Mike) is threatened to be wiped out completely by the Panama Disease sound agricultural advice for stemming the spread of the Disease is ignored until it is too late. The book touches on the numerous U.S. military interventions into South and Central America to put down worker revolts that were striking for better wages and treatment from the large banana exporters like United Fruit and Standard Fruit. One can draw a number of parallels to recent events.

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