Have you ever shaken 'hands' with a banana? Pretty crazy question, huh? Well, take a look at the tall stalk on this banana plant and I’ll explain. It takes almost eighteen months, from when the stalk first begins to grow, to when it starts to produce flowers and fruit. Every week while the stem is growing, it unfurls one or two broad leaves that can stretch out to almost nine feet long! In some tropical places in the world, people use banana leaves to build the roofs on their houses or wrap food in them before cooking!

Not every banana plant makes sweet fruit for eating. Plantain bananas are starchy – kind of like a potato. They’re always cooked and play an important role in the daily diet of families in Africa and South America. Other types of bananas are grown for their fiber, while some are just meant for decoration in somebody’s yard.

The sweet banana plant produces as many as ten huge flower clusters, which are called… “hands.” When the young bananas emerge from the female flowers, they look like a bunch of skinny green fingers pointing up to the sky. Since a stem can produce over 50 pounds of bananas, it’s not surprising that all that weight eventually makes the stalk droop - until the whole bunch is hanging upside down! A stalk produces fruit only once, and after the bananas have been harvested, the stalk will die. But soon a new stalk will begin to grow, which starts the process all over again! If there are any bananas hanging from our plants today, does it look like they’re pointing and waiting to shake your hand?