GO BANANAS! AMAZING BENEFITS AND USES FOR THIS NOT-SO-SIMPLE FRUIT

AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH FOR

WILLARD BOEDECKER

We’ve heard songs about it. We’ve watched slapstick comedies feature punch lines about slipping and falling on its peel. We’ve all heard old timers tell jokes that can easily make us groan, like Groucho Marx’s oldie, “Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana,” but lately, I’ve been hearing some fairly fascinating information about this simple yet mystical fruit, and I’d like to share some of this information with you.

It seems that the common yellow food we’ve been enjoying in our everyday lives has been around for thousands of years. Some reports teach us that backing ancient Greece, Alexander the Great enjoyed bananas. Although they seem to have been discovered in Southeast Asia, bananas are grown in about 107 tropical climates throughout the world and India is credited with being the largest producer of bananas in this day and age. In some African cultures, the banana is such an important source of nutrition that the word for “banana” and “food” is the same. Bananas were said to have been brought to the Americas thanks to Portuguese explorers, and although we may think of them as banana “trees” that can grow to be quite tall with leaves that can be as big as almost 9 feet long and 2 feet wide, the banana is actually a plant and not a tree. The leaves, being so large, are used in some cultures as umbrellas. They are also fibrous and are used in making textiles, and of course, in the cuisines of many cultures, the leaves themselves are used for cooking. Banana fiber is versatile to say the least. It is used in making ropes and mats and is slowly being introduced into the context of wearing apparel in much the same way as we see hemp and bamboo fibers used in the knitting and weaving processes. In cooking, banana leaves are used in cuisines throughout the world. As an article posted by KQED in San Francisco reminds us, “From Mexican tamales to Indian wedding feasts, Malaysian lunches to Vietnamese fast food, these leaves provide pliable, compostable tableware and a lovely flavoring for steamed or simmered specialties.”

That all sounds nice and tasty, but that’s just the beginning of the benefits of bananas!!! We now know that they’ve been around for thousands of years, they’re grown all over the world, and they’ve inspired songs and jokes and all sorts of “food for thought.” Bananas are rich in potassium, which is essential for good nerve and muscle function. The Livestrong.org website gives us even more insight into the benefits and properties of bananas. Here we learn that although B vitamins are usually found in most animal products, vitamin B-6 is readily found here and this vitamin is essential in cell renewal. B vitamins and B-6 in particular can play an important role in handling nicotine withdrawal and may be a vital key for anyone who is trying to quit smoking. Bananas also have manganese, which is needed for bone health and metabolism, as well as smaller amounts of important vitamins and minerals like folate, calcium, iron and magnesium. Livestrong also teaches us that bananas may be the perfect “brain food.” Bananas supply nutrients essential for proper neurological functioning, thus supporting functions like focus and memory. They also contain tryptophan and tyrosine, which have been shown to aid and support good mental health and may possibly help in the prevention of depression. The potassium in bananas also aids in delivering oxygen to the brain while the magnesium component aids in the elimination of waste bi-products like ammonia.

An article in Reader’s Digest gives us even more insight into the versatility of this clearly amazing fruit. Although I haven’t tried these tips myself, and article titled, “9 Uncommon Uses for Bananas,” advises that we can use the banana leaves to tenderize a roast, use the insides of the peels to polish silverware and clean the leaves of houseplants, and of course, thanks to the rich presence of potassium, dried banana peels can make excellent fertilizer, plant food and mulch.

I know that I, for one, will look at the seemingly simple banana in a whole new light, and I hope you will too, and the next time anyone begins to sing, “Yes we have no bananas,” I will hope it isn’t true! Thank you!