



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## ***Michelia figo***<sup>1</sup>

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### **Introduction**

Banana Shrub is a dense, upright, evergreen shrub when young that eventually forms a rounded canopy (Fig. 1). It attains a height of 10 to 15 feet in sunny locations. It has lustrous, dark green foliage with brown hairs on the underside. Brown hairs cover the green twigs so densely that twigs appear brown. The fragrant, 1 1/2-inch-diameter, light-yellow flowers are edged in maroon and are magnolia-like in appearance. They last from spring until early summer and have a very interesting fragrance; they smell like ripening cantaloupes or bananas. This smell can be very pleasant but can be overwhelming when these shrubs are massed together. The bark of the Banana Shrub becomes a dark grayish-brown color with age.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Michelia figo*

**Pronunciation:** my-KEEL-lee-uh FYE-go

**Common name(s):** Banana Shrub

**Family:** *Magnoliaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7B through 10 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

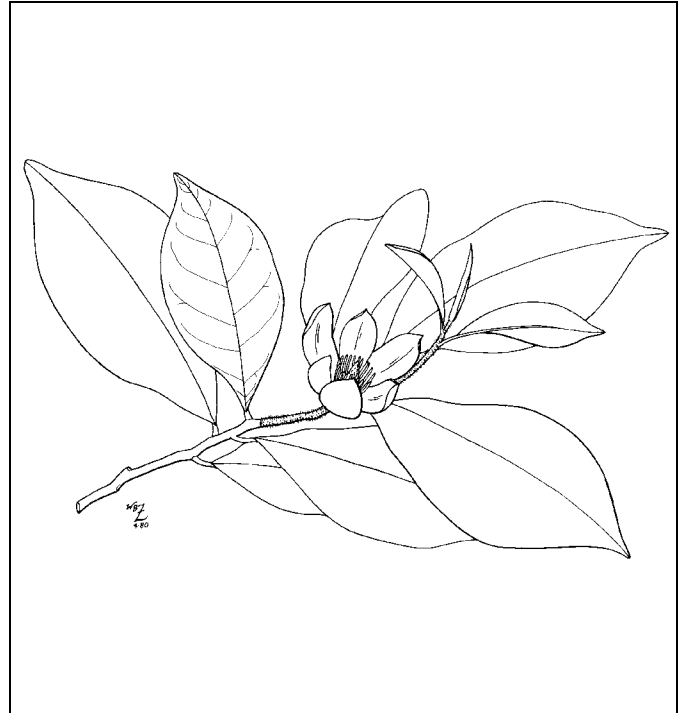
**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** near a deck or patio; specimen; espalier; screen; border

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



**Figure 1.** Banana Shrub.

### **Description**

**Height:** 10 to 20 feet

**Spread:** 6 to 15 feet

**Plant habit:** upright; pyramidal

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Foliage**

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** oblong
- Leaf venation:** pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen
- Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- Flower color:** yellow
- Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering

**Fruit**

- Fruit shape:** oval
- Fruit length:** less than .5 inch
- Fruit cover:** dry or hard
- Fruit color:** red

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk
- Current year stem/twig color:** brown
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

- Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun
- Soil tolerances:** acidic; sand; loam; clay;
- Drought tolerance:** moderate
- Soil salt tolerances:** unknown
- Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

## Use and Management

Banana Shrub is generally used as a specimen and foundation plant and is well suited for planting in a large container. Older plants can be trained into small, multi-trunked trees with a vase shape. It is quite urban tolerant.

*Michelia figo* prefers a well-drained, acid, organic soil that is of medium fertility and moisture. It grows well in full sun or a mostly shaded location. Shaded plants grow taller than sun grown plants and develop a central leader with little pruning; whereas, sun grown plants often develop several trunks with a rounded to vase-shaped canopy.

Cultivars include: 'Stubbs Purple' - flowers more purple than the species; and 'Port Wine' - compact habit to about 6-foot-tall with more maroon in the flower than the species.

Propagate this plant by cuttings because the seeds are nonviable.

### Pests and Diseases

Banana Shrub is relatively free of any pests or diseases. However, scales and mushroom rot may become a problem. A scale infestation can cause some defoliation.