Managing banana stools to maximize production

Recognize the problem
As a banana plant grows it starts to produce new shoots known as suckers from the base of the stem. The suckers grow from the underground part of the plant known as the stool. If a banana produces too many suckers, this negatively affects production of the fruit and makes management difficult.

Background
Each additional sucker takes more water and food from the stool. If there are too many suckers, they will reduce water and food available for the mother plant. Fewer, smaller and poorer quality bananas will be produced. Too many suckers will make pruning, manuring and harvesting difficult and pests and diseases are more likely to occur. It is therefore important to control the number of suckers for each banana plant.

Management
Plant banana in holes not less than 60x60x60cm (2ft x 2ft x 2ft) to ensure that roots anchor well in the soil and the plants can withstand toppling by wind. When the mother plant has reached 1 meter tall, select 3 well developed suckers. The best suckers to keep have small, spear shaped leaves. All other suckers should be removed.

- Cut the unwanted suckers near ground level making sure that you do not injure the suckers that will be kept. To prevent sprouting from the cut sucker, pour 5-10mls (1-2 teaspoonfuls) kerosene over the surface.
- After 1-2 months, select the most actively growing sucker and cut the other suckers.

The final number of suckers per stool depends on the banana variety:

- Dwarf varieties such as Chinese dwarf should have 3 suckers per stool, consisting of a bearing mother plant, a large daughter and a small granddaughter sucker or pepper.
- Medium and tall varieties such as 'Williams hybrid' and 'Grand Naine' should have 3-5 suckers per stool.

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: many countries where this pest or problem is present

Authors: Helen Omondi, John Mutisya
Agricultural Information Resource Centre, MoA, PO Box 66730-00800, Nairobi
tel: +254 722 434643 email: hhkaudo@yahoo.com

Edited by Plantwise.