1- INTRODUCTION

Banana is considered as one of the most popular and favourite fruits in the world since, it has an excellent flavour, nice taste and high nutritional value. Banana is consumed either as ripe fruits, or cooked vegetable, in addition to many other miscellaneous uses as banana flour, confections and alcoholic drinks. [Von Loesecke (1950) and Simmonds (1966)].

From the economical point of view, banana fruits are considered the green gold of some banana producing countries as, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Canary Islands and Formosa [Von Loesecke (1950)].

Botanically, Banana is a monocotyledonous plant under the family Musaceae, Order Zingiberales.

The banana family Musaceae contains species such as Musa textilis from which Manila hemp (abaca) is produced as well as 32 other species which are important as a source of fruit, vegetable, fiber, and ornamentals. The number of edible varieties of banana run into the hundreds [Simmond (1966)]. Also, Simmonds (1966) estimates that fewer than half of the varieties of the world are well-known so that many years will elapse before an authoritative list of names and identities is completed. Banana varieties vary in their plant height, leaf dimensions, stem color,
bunch character and fruit characteristics such as dimensions, color, or waxiness.

Moreover, the world production of Banana reached 42.5 millions tons in 1985. Most of this quantity is produced in tropical countries while few amounts are produced in subtropical regions. The largest part of this production (about 7 millions tons) is exported to other countries.

In Egypt, banana is one of the most popular fruits since its acreage ranks fourth after citrus, grapes and mangoes. Banana production was not sufficient to cover the demand of local Egyptian markets*. Therefore, Egypt imported about 12,000 tons of banana in 1981 and about 19,000 tons in 1982. Since that time, several new banana cultivars were introduced to Egypt to improve the quality and quantity of banana production. In 1987, total area of banana in Egypt attained 34,895 feddans and produced 382,298 tons.** However, 80% of this area is planted with "Hindi" cultivar.

Accordingly, the present study was conducted to evaluate different varieties of banana i.e., local producing cultivars (Hindi, Maghrabi and Mohamed Ali); cultivars introduced from India (Basrai, paradica, Ambel and Sindih) and cultivars introduced from Israel and Somalia (Williams and Poyo, respectively) through studying major characteristics of vegetative growth, yield, fruit properties and chemical analysis. Such evaluation is essential, at this stage, to allow for a sound selection of cultivars to be planted in new plantations in areas of the same environmental and cultural conditions.
