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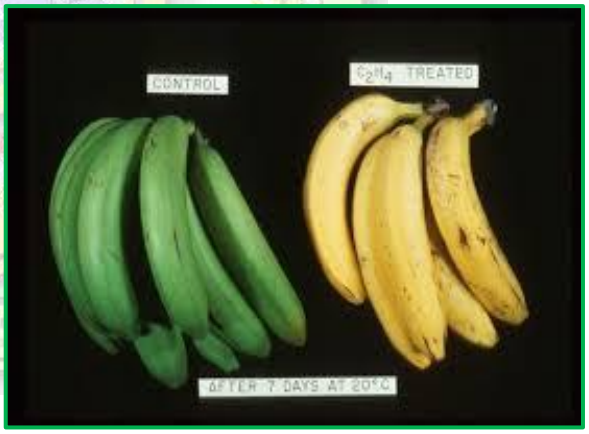
# The Role of Ethylene in the Post-Harvest Senescence of *Musa acuminata*: Biochemical Mechanisms and Industrial Optimization

*Priyanka, Manisha, Anita Choudhary, Hemlata Gurjar, Rakesh Choudhary and Naveen Lamror
M.Sc. Scholar, CoA, Nagaur, AU, Jodhpur (Rajasthan), India
*Corresponding Author's email: priyanka20020801@gmail.com

Bananas (*Musa acuminata* ) are climacteric fruits harvested at a "mature green" stage to facilitate global transport. The transition to edibility is governed by the gaseous phytohormone ethylene($C_2H_4$), which acts as a molecular trigger for coordinated ripening. This paper synthesizes the biochemical pathways of ethylene-induced maturation—including enzymatic starch hydrolysis, chlorophyll degradation, and cell-wall softening—with the technical requirements of commercial ripening facilities. By optimizing exogenous ethylene concentrations, temperature, and humidity, the industry ensures uniform fruit quality and reduced post-harvest waste. The banana is one of the most economically significant fruits globally, yet its highly perishable nature requires precise post-harvest management. Ethylene, a simple hydrocarbon, serves as the primary endogenous regulator of the ripening process. In the absence of controlled ripening, individual fruits within a cluster would ripen asynchronously, leading to significant commercial loss. This study examines how ethylene modulates the physiological "climacteric rise" and how these natural processes are replicated in industrial ripening chambers.

## Biochemical Mechanisms of Ripening




Ethylene initiates a cascade of genetic expressions that transform the fruit's chemical composition across four primary dimensions:

**Enzymatic Carbohydrate Transformation**

Ethylene induces the expression of alpha-amylase, beta-amylase, and phosphorylase. These enzymes catalyze the hydrolysis of insoluble starch into soluble sugars (glucose, fructose, and sucrose).

**Chlorophyll Catabolism and Pigment Synthesis**

The hormone promotes the synthesis of chlorophyllase, an enzyme that breaks down the green chlorophyll in the exocarp. As the green pigment fades, the underlying yellow carotenoids—previously masked—become visible. This visual transition is the primary indicator of ripeness for consumers.

**Structural Softening**

Firmness loss is governed by the degradation of the middle lamella and primary cell walls. Ethylene activates:

- **Pectin Methylesterase (PME)**
- **Polygalacturonase (PG)** These enzymes solubilize pectin, transitioning the texture from a rigid, starchy state to a soft, palatable consistency.

**Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) Synthesis**

The characteristic "banana" aroma is the result of ethylene-triggered production of esters (such as isoamyl acetate), alcohols, and aldehydes. These volatiles are synthesized in the final stages of ripening to signal peak edibility.

## Commercial Ripening and Environmental Optimization

To synchronize ripening for retail, "mature green" bananas are processed in specialized ripening chambers. Success depends on the precise calibration of three variables:

| Variable | Optimal Range | Function |
|---|---|---|
| Ethylene Concentration | 100 – 1,000 ppm | Triggers the autocatalytic "System 2" ripening response. |
| Temperature | 18°C – 22°C (64°F – 72°F) | Accelerates metabolic rates without inducing heat stress or chilling injury. |
| Relative Humidity | 90% – 95% | Prevents moisture loss (transpiration) and maintains peel turgidity. |

## Factors Influencing Ripening Efficacy

The efficacy of ethylene is not absolute; it is moderated by the surrounding atmosphere:

- **Carbon Dioxide ($CO_2$) Interference:** acts as a natural competitive inhibitor of ethylene. In commercial chambers, $CO_2$ levels must be kept below 1% via ventilation to ensure ethylene can bind to its receptors.
- **Sensitivity Thresholds:** Exposure to as little as 0.1 ppm of ethylene can initiate ripening in mature fruit. Conversely, over-exposure (excessively high ppm) leads to "boiled" fruit—a condition where the pulp softens faster than the peel can turn yellow.

## Benefits of using ethylene generators in banana ripening

1. Consistent and uniform ripening: Ethylene generators provide ripeners with precise control over the ripening process, resulting in consistent and uniform ripening throughout their banana batches. This consistency ensures that all bananas reach the desired level of ripeness, enhancing the overall quality and flavor of the fruit.
2. Accelerated ripening: With ethylene generators, ripeners can achieve faster ripening times without compromising the quality of the fruit. The controlled release of ethylene gas allows for a higher concentration, accelerating the ripening process and enabling businesses to meet customer demand more efficiently.
3. Cost and labour savings: By eliminating the need for manual ripening methods, ethylene generators significantly reduce labour costs and save valuable time. Ripeners can automate the ripening process, freeing up resources to focus on other aspects of their operations.
4. Increased profitability: Consistent ripening and quick ripening result in higher-quality fruit, which translates into increased customer satisfaction and profitability. Businesses can supply ripe bananas to the market faster, more efficiently, maximizing sales opportunities and minimizing waste.

## Promoting safe and sustainable fruit ripening practices

There are viable alternatives like ethylene gas that can provide consumers with high-quality, flavorful, and nutritious fruits while also minimizing the negative consequences on health and the environment. By embracing natural ripening methods, such as the use of ethylene gas, or adopting organic and sustainable farming practices, the fruit industry can work towards a more responsible and consumer centric approach to fruit production and distribution.

## Conclusion

Ethylene is the fundamental catalyst that bridges the gap between agricultural production and consumer readiness. Through the enzymatic breakdown of starches and pectins, ethylene transforms a high-fiber, low-sugar fruit into a nutrient-dense food source. The integration of

ripening chambers and atmospheric controls represents a pinnacle of post-harvest technology, allowing for the stabilization of the global banana supply chain.

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