

Edible & Landscape Gingers for Your Garden

By Ceil Dow

Ginger Grower

Friends of Mercer Botanic Gardens

Growing gingers is so easy! Gingers are tropical plants, but there are numerous varieties that are cold hardy to zone 9. Gingers have rhizomes (underground stems) that grow and spread underground. They like rich organic soil that drains well. Gingers grow in the tropics where rain is plentiful, so providing enough water is important. Gingers are vigorous growers and respond well to an application of an all-purpose fertilizer (12-12-12 or 13-13-13) in spring and monthly during the summer.

Many gingers go dormant in the winter. The leaves will yellow and die down as the nights get cooler (like Curcumas, Globbas, Kaempferias and Zingibers) or die back at the first frost (Hedychiums). Gingers usually prefer a layer of mulch like pine bark or even leaves /pine needles heaped upon them like a soft blanket during the winter to protect their tender rhizomes. After freeze damage, cut and remove the dead foliage. In spring, the soil temperatures must reach 70 degrees for the ginger rhizome to initiate growth. Hedychiums are one of the first to emerge because they are usually planted in a sunnier location while Kaempferias and Curcumas will not emerge until late May or early June. Shadier locations are the last areas to warm up.

After a few years, a clump of gingers will become a tangled mat of rhizomes. These tight bundles of roots create a haven for fungus and bacteria that can cause gingers to decline. As a rule, they should be divided every few years in early spring. Division is a happy occasion for gingers, not only do they respond with greater vigor and more blooms, but there is an abundance of “leftovers” that can be shared with neighbors and friends!

S – Sun. Can grow in full sun all day

PS – Part Sun. Must have some sun protection in heat of day.

FS – Filtered Sun. Can grow in filtered sun all day. Usually means under a high canopy of leaves.

PSH - Part Shade. Bright shade. Needs a bit of sun to grow well.

Sh – Shade. No direct sun needed.

CULINARY GINGERS

Zingiber officinale– ‘Edible Ginger’ Culinary Ginger 4’ - 5’ PS FS Great addition to an herb garden. Not particularly pretty as a landscape plant, however. Unremarkable plant with slender leaves and slightly arching leaf stalks. Bears basal and sometimes terminal inflorescences that are green with maroon & white petite flowers. Easy to grow. This plant needs protection in severe freezes of 28 degrees or below. Rhizomes are used fresh and dried in cooking. Also used in Chinese medicine for upset stomach and ingestion.

Curcuma longa– Turmeric; Hidden Ginger 4’ – 5’ FS Tall pleated leaves hardly obscure the 5 – 6 inch wide inflorescences which are colored with a bright white coma fading to soft green lower bracts. Robust, hardy and easy to grow in rich soil with regular watering. Cultivar C. longa ‘Bright White’ is a more decorative landscape variety with larger, white & prettier blooms. The rhizome & flower can still be used in cooking. The rhizomes are boiled in water then dried in ovens before being pounded into a powder for use as a spice. Immature flowers are also boiled in water and eaten as a vegetable. In its native India, the powdered spice is used as an antiseptic for cuts and burns. Zone 8.

Curcuma caesia-Black Turmeric 4’ PS FS Black turmeric is native to Northeastern and Central India where it has been part of cultural ceremonies and medicinal remedies for centuries. It is traditionally made into a paste and applied topically to heal wounds, skin irritations, and snake and insect bites. The paste is believed to have antibacterial and antifungal properties and is also ingested to soothe an upset stomach and relieve digestive issues. The color of the rhizome is blackish-blue internally and has a bitter taste, but a pleasant aroma. Even though it bears the common name Turmeric, it is not usually used in culinary dishes.

Elettaria cardamomum - Green Cardamom, Cardamon 6’ – 13’ Native of southern India & Sri Lanka. The sweetly fragrant green seed pod of this plant is used whole, individual small black seeds or ground. It is used in northern Indian and Moghul dishes including sweetmeats and desserts. Available in spice departments. This plant cannot be grown locally. Sometimes, *Alpinia nutans* is sold as Cardamon. However it is NOT the true cardamom and cannot be substituted for it.

Amomum subulatum - Black Cardamom, Brown Cardamom 6’ Native to native to the damp, forested valleys of the eastern Himalayas to central China. The largest producer of the black cardamom is Nepal, followed by India and Bhutan. Usually sold as whole seed pods. Dried over open flames, the smokey flavor is used to flavor hearty meat stews and the broth for the noodle soups called pho. Available in specialty spice departments. This plant cannot be grown locally. Sometimes, *Alpinia nutans* is sold as Cardamon. However it is NOT the true cardamom and cannot be substituted for it.

Alpinia nutans – False Cardamom. 5’ PS-SH NOT USED AS A CULINARY SPICE. Sometimes sold as Cardomon but is not a substitute for the spice. However it is very aromatic. Just rub or crush a leaf to release the exotic spicy fragrance! So easy to grow in dense or partly shady areas. Blooms only after a mild winter.

Alpinia galanga – Greater Galanga 5’ PS Prized for its ability to bloom even if frozen back! Thick heads of creamy white flowers appear at the top of 6’ tall stems in summer. Leaves are narrow, 6- 8 inches long and fragrant when crushed. Great as an accent plant in the shady area of herb garden or as an outdoor potted plant. It is used fresh or dried in oriental cooking, mainly Thai for a spicy flavor. Fresh rhizomes are often cut in thin slices for Thai soups & stir-fries and grated for curries. Also used in Chinese medicine as an antibacterial, antifungal and anti-inflammatory agent. Zone 7b

Kaempferia galanga – Kencur, Peacock Ginger 6” PSH SH Decorative plant for in front of the border or as a specimen plant in a ginger garden or herb garden. There are different varieties of *K. galangal*, The standard *K. galangal* is green, grows to 4” tall with slightly ribbed leaves. Blooms out of the center crown with white & purple flowers in summer. Another variety, *K. galanga* ‘Red Flat Leaf’, is a prostrate ginger with deep red leaves that hug the ground. It also blooms out of the center crown with white & purple flowers in summer. Falls dormant in winter. Must be kept fairly dry while dormant. The rhizome is used in oriental cooking whole or chopped and put into stew and curries. Also an ingredient in Beras Kencur, a favorite Malaysian beverage.

Curcuma amada – Mango Ginger 4’ S PS FS Edible ginger. This is an edible ginger and an excellent landscape plant. The rhizomes are not often used as a ground spice but eaten raw, pickled or cooked whole. The name, “Mango Ginger” refers to the smell of the rhizome which is similar to an unripe Mango. This is a vigorous grower that produces large, oval, ribbed leaves and long stemmed inflorescences. Bracts are tinted purple with petite yellow florets emerging from each bract. It is an early summer bloomer that repeats all summer long. A spectacular performer in the garden which is edible with beautiful foliage, a long blooming season and tropical cut flowers.

LANDSCAPE GINGERS

HEDYCHIUM

The name comes from the Greek “hedy” meaning sweet and “chion” meaning snow which describes the heavenly fragrance and beautiful color of *Hedychium coronarium*. The flowers of this genus are well known for their butterfly shape hence the common name, “Butterfly Ginger”. Large, pastel blossoms attract night flying moths and small, richly colored blossoms attract day flying butterflies. Species are usually erect, standing 3’ – 10’ tall. A freeze will force them into dormancy but they are usually the first gingers to emerge in the spring. *Hedychiums* can tolerate more sun than other gingers. Plants bloom on new year’s growth. As canes finish flowering in the summer, they should be cut off at ground level to encourage new growth. New canes will produce another flush of blooms. Fertilize once to twice a month during the growing the season. Plants are propagated by rhizome division. Most *Hedychium* species will produce seeds and can be hand pollinated which creates one of the most popular gingers to hybridize. *Hedychiums* are also very beautiful in cut flower arrangements. Individual flowers last only a day but spent flowers can be removed easily. Plants are native to Madagascar, Indomalaysia and southwest China.

Hedychium coronarium – White Butterfly Ginger. 5’ PS Large 3” white butterfly shaped flowers emerge from bracts on a green cone. Heavenly gardenia like fragrance.

Hedychium coronarium Plant – White Butterfly Ginger. 5’ PS Cluster of leaf stalks with inflorescences to show size & habit of plant. This easy to grow plant can be grown in large containers, perennial garden, soggy soil or in water feature. Blooms start in June and repeat off and on throughout the summer and into fall.

Hedychium ‘Disney’ – Bottle Brush Ginger. 5’ PS S Slender blue-green leaves. Huge inflorescence with small orange-red flowers blooming from 6 precise vertical rows. Butterfly attractor. Repeat bloomer throughout early summer and into fall.

Hedychium ‘Dave Case’ (syn. *H. ‘Hawaiian Pink’*) – Butterfly Ginger. 6’ PS Stately & tall, this is a perfect plant for back of the perennial border. Topping each leaf stalk is a 10”-12” tall inflorescence. Sweetly scented, coral colored blossoms appear in multitudes throughout the warmest months.

Hedychium ‘Moy’s Giant’ – Butterfly Ginger. 7’ PS S Robust, tall and heavenly fragrant!! Blooms repeatedly in summer through fall with massive heads of pale yellow blossoms and deep yellow centers. Strong, thick stems support large leaves up to 16 inches long! Grows and blooms very quickly and easily!

Hedychium ‘Pink V’ – Butterfly Ginger. 7’- 8’ FS PS S The most prolific bloomer from June-fall. Creamy blossoms with pink-orange “V” in center. Light citrus fragrance. Blooms even in a heat wave!! Best Butterfly Ginger for sun.

Hedychium ‘Sherry Baby’ – Orange Butterfly Ginger. 7’ FS PS S Vigorous! Robust! Floriferous! Gorgeous! Just a few adjectives that describe one of the finest summer bloomers! Erect, sturdy stems are topped with a giant ball of fat blossoms colored in golden orange with a deeper orange center. Easy to grow and bloom.

Hedychium thrysiforme x maximum – Butterfly Ginger. 5’. PS Clusters of white frilly flowers with long extended stamens appear in July and continue well into late fall. Leaves are slightly pleated.

Hedychium 'Kong' – Butterfly Ginger. 10' FS PS S A giant among butterfly gingers!! Even the inflorescence is a giant at 2' long!! Golden blossoms with orange red stamens starting in July and repeats in August and Sept if watered well. Show stopping! Surprisingly, it blooms in pot culture but stays much shorter.

Butterfly Ginger Seed Pod Pods appear after pollination and grow in size throughout fall and into winter. When fully ripened, they open to reveal vibrant red seeds and an orange pod interior. If wanting to try your hand at growing from seed, collect mature opened seed pods in the late fall when seeds seem ready to fall out. Plant immediately in a soilless mix and cover them with a light layer of perlite. Place in Ziploc bag. Best grown in warm greenhouse or indoors under a gro light & heat mat. Seeds may take several months to germinate & sprout best when soil temperatures warms to 70-75°F. Carefully transplant seedlings into individual pots. Keep warm, moist and fertilize lightly. Mature seedlings can be transplanted into the garden when temperatures are consistently warm.

CURCUMAS

Curcumas are classified as “Hidden Gingers” and “Tulip Gingers”. Hidden because the flower stem is shorter than the height of the leaves, consequently, one must “search” for the “hidden” treasure (flower). Tulip Gingers grow its inflorescence above its leaves and has outward curved bracts that resemble a tulip flower. Spring bloomers blossom with bright and spectacular inflorescences as the leaves first emerge, usually in late April to early May. Summer bloomers flower from June and continue until the early Fall with a dazzling array of exotic colors and sizes. Their height can vary from 10” to 8’. After the first cold wind of fall, the leaves turn yellow, fall over and eventually separate from its rhizome. During this process, the plant is storing energy for the next year’s growth and bloom. Do not cut leaves off prematurely, otherwise the process will be disturbed and decrease the amount of blooms for the following year. Most are propagated by finger-like rhizomes which can be broken off and planted. The colorful inflorescences make stunning cut flowers and the foliage makes great filler in large arrangements. Fertilize once a month during their growing season. Keep dry in the winter.

Curcuma elata – Giant Plume Ginger. 8' PS-S Giant flowers emerge in mid spring. Deep pink inflorescence is 2' hi & 8” wide. Wide pleated foliage with a red midrib appears after flowering. Midrib fades as summer progresses.

Curcuma 'Laddawan' – Tulip Ginger 3' PS FS S This is an exceptional sun loving ginger with multitudes of tall, rosy-pink flower spikes that stand as high as 3'! Blooms continuously throughout the heat of the summer. An excellent cut flower, it can be showcased as a tropical accent plant or used in the perennial garden. This is an outstanding cross between *Curcuma cordata* and *Curcuma alismatifolia*.

Curcuma 'Ban Rei Red' – Red Torch Ginger 3' PS FS Gorgeous inflorescence with dramatic red and pink pocket-like bracts. Bright yellow flowers peek out from each pouch. Easy to grow in filtered sun in a garden or container with a rich, well-draining soil. Blooms appear by late June and continue until fall. Developed in Thailand at the Chaing Mai University, it is a cross between *C. aurantiaca* & *C. petiolata*. It makes a superb and long lasting cut flower.

Curcuma 'Maejo White' – White Torch Ginger 3' PS FS Whorls of pearlescent white bracts grace a tall and stately stem. Peeking from within the lower peridot-tinted bracts are petite, white flowers with amethyst highlights. Stunning if planted in groups in front of the border. Blooms appear in succession throughout the hot summer and warm fall days.

Curcuma 'Emerald Choc Zebra'– Tulip Ginger 2' PS FS Absolutely the most floriferous bloomer of Curcumas!!! Easy to bloom in containers and garden. Flower spikes are held high above the foliage with light emerald green bracts that darken to stripes of burgundy toward the stem. Petite lavender flowers appear in the pouch-like bracts. Excellent cut flower and blooms continuously throughout summer & autumn.

Curcuma 'Twister' - Siam Tulip Ginger 18” FS PS A very early blooming “Tulip Ginger” with its inflorescence standing above the leaves. Inflorescence bracts twist around the stem instead of neatly stacked bracts. Stacks of bright pink bracts trimmed in white & green are displayed among leaves that are lightly pleated. This summer jewel can be grown in a container or in a well-draining spot in the shady garden.

GLOBBA

Globbas consist of shade plants ranging in height from 2' – 5'. They are attractive foliage plants but are known for their unusual pendent flowers which are commonly called “Dancing Ladies”. The Globba inflorescence is an amazing cut flower since they can last in a vase for 3 to 4 weeks!!! No kidding!! There are many ways to propagate members of this genus. Clumps of plants can be carefully divided in spring. Many species produce bulbils which are small beige white balls appearing along the stem and into the inflorescence. These bulbils naturally drop off the stem and get buried under leaf litter of fall to emerge as young plants the following year. Cold weather in October or November will signal the Globbas to fall into dormancy. They re-emerge in late May. Fertilize once a month in summer. Native to south China and Indomalaysia

Globba grandiflora – Dancing Lady Ginger. 2' SH PSH Gorgeous wine colored bracts with yellow flowers. Best cut flower of Globbas lasting 4 weeks in cut flower arrangement. Needs excellent drainage.

Globba winitii 'Pink' – Dancing Lady Ginger. 2' SH PSH Smaller than *Globba grandiflora*, this small Dancing Lady is just as exquisite. Blooming in late June until the cold weather arrives in autumn, pendent flower scapes are covered in wide, pink-purple bracts with petite, yellow flowers extending from them.

Globba globulifera – Dancing Girl Ginger. 2' SH PSH Petite, sunny yellow flowers emerge from this compact, wine colored, globe-shaped inflorescence throughout the summer months. This incredible bloom lasts for weeks and weeks in the garden and up to 3 weeks as a cut flower! Multiplies freely by producing bulbils.

Globba schomburgkii – Yellow Dancing Lady. 2'. Shade. Yellow flowers in summer. Very hardy. Produces volumes of bulbils when flowering which produces a colony the following year. Excellent cut flower. Great starter plant for children.

Globba schomburgkii – Yellow Dancing Lady. *Globba schomburgkii* with asexually produced bulbils at the base of the inflorescence. The bulbils can start to grow into keikis which are an exact duplicate of the parent plant. Some keikis will bloom & produce bulbils of their own as seen in the photo to the right.

KAEMPFERIA

Kaempferia are often called “Peacock Gingers” because of the striking peacock-like pattern of its leaves. Plants are short and rarely grow taller than 2'. Their diminutive height makes them the perfect “front of the border” plant or ground cover for shady areas. Most plants have small purple or purple and white flowers which appear shortly after they emerge in late spring to early summer. Individual flowers last only a day but the plants bloom almost continuously throughout summer and into fall. Some species bloom in spring even before leaves emerge (*Kaempferia rotunda*). Clumps can be divided in spring when they emerge. Some Kaempferia make seeds which make hybridizing fun and easy! The fanciful and diverse pattern of their leaves make Kaempferias addicting to collect! Fertilize as soon as they emerge and then once a month during the summer. The cold winds of late fall signal plants to drop into dormancy. Keep plants dry over the winter months. Plants are native to tropical Asia.

Kaempferia pulchra 'Manson' – Peacock Ginger 6" Shade. Easy ground covers for shady areas. Takes the heat & humidity. Blooms until it goes dormant. Peacock pattern strong in spring but fades to green in summer. Reseeds so it makes a great colonizer for shady areas.

Kaempferia 'albomarginata' – Peacock Ginger 3" PSH SH FS Common problems with Kaempferias. Snails can sometimes be a problem for Peacock Gingers since they grow at ground level and are an easy dinner for them. Since Kaempferias have tender new growth, pine needles hurtling to the ground will sometimes stab the new growth. As the leaves unfurl, the holes are very noticeable.

Kaempferia galangal 'Red Flat Leaf' – Peacock Ginger 3" PSH SH FS Mammoth, flat burgundy leaves flat to the ground, almost hugging it. Crepe-like, large white flowers with a dark purple center appear in the leaf's crown. Likes shade, rich friable, excellent draining soil.

Kaempferia angustifolia 'Laos Silver Stripes' – Peacock Ginger 6" PSH SH NEW & RARE!

One of the most beautiful of all *Kaempferia angustifolia* cultivars! Lance shaped leaves are boldly striped with silver bands against a deep grey-green background. Striking purple & white, orchid shaped flowers appear in its central crown usually early in the summer.

ALPINIAS

This is the largest genus in the Zingiberaceae family with over 150 species. Most have attractive foliage while others are coveted for their large floral racemes. A few species have a spicy fragrance when their leaves are crushed. Most bloom on second's year growth. So if the plant freezes back, the bloom is lost. Canes that have bloomed should be removed after blooming. This will encourage new growth. *Alpinia* can be propagated by rhizome division in the spring. Fertilize once a month during the growing season. Native to Southeast Asia, New Guinea, tropical Australia and the Pacific Islands.

Alpinia zerumbet – Shell Ginger. 8' – 10' PS – S Can be grown in deep shade where the leaves appear a deep blue green. In full sun, leaves will look more peridot green. Leaves are extremely fragrant!! Fabulous evergreen that can be used as a screen. Very lush. Zone 7b

Alpinia zerumbet inflorescence – Shell Ginger. 8' – 10' PS – S Best known for its beautiful inflorescence which looks like a string of soft pink shells hence its common name. Excellent cut flower.

ZINGIBER

“Edible Ginger”, “Pine Cone Ginger” and “Shampoo Ginger” are all common names for members of the Zingiber genus. Plants are often characterized by their arching canes and basal inflorescences which often emerge green and turn crimson red as they mature. Many species are used as foliage plants because of their attractive leaves. Plants range from 2' – 8'. Plant clumps can be divided in spring by rhizome division. Plants are forced into dormancy with the first freeze in winters. Fertilize as soon as the plants emerge in late spring and then once a month during summer. Native of eastern Asia, Indomalaysia and northern Australia.

Zingiber zerumbet Shampoo Ginger, Awapuhi, Pine Cone Ginger 5' PS Plant has an arching habit with shiny green leaves. The tall flower scape is a separate stem with a terminal red cone & spicy fragrance. A gingery liquid gushes out when squeezed. This wonderfully fragrant liquid is often used in shampoos and body washes. Great and long lasting cut flowers. Easy plant to grow & bloom!

Zingiber zerumbet variegata 'Darceyi' – Pinecone Ginger, Shampoo Ginger. 5' PS Truly beautiful leaves on arching stalks are green with strong splashes of bright white. Multiplies better in sunnier locations.

Zingiber 'Twice as Nice'– Pinecone Ginger 3' PS FS PSH More compact version of the Shampoo Ginger with basal & terminal blooms!! In mid-summer, inflorescences appear at leaf stalk tip and basally which emerge green then matures to crimson red. Each cone oozes a fragrant liquid when given the slightest squeeze. Provide excellent drainage. Great in arrangements. Easy to grow and bloom.

COSTUS

The Costus family no longer belong to the Ginger family but is grown alongside them because of their similar growing requirements. Costus are basically different from other gingers because they have a true stem and the leaves are spirally arranged around the stem. Sometimes the stem seem to “twirl” in an upward spiral thus inspiring the name, “Spiral Gingers”. All Costus are propagated by root division and stem cuttings. Vertically or horizontally lay the stem in rich friable soil. Roots will develop along the nodes. Some Costus like *Cheilocostus speciosus* produce seeds. In zone 8, hardy Costus will freeze to the ground in winter and then return in spring as soon as warm weather returns. Fertilize when they emerge in spring and once to twice a month during summer and early fall. Inflorescences are long lasting in the garden and in cut flower arrangements. Very tropical bloom! The species listed here are endemic to southeast Asia, Central and South America and Africa.

Costus scaber – Spiral Ginger. 5'. Sun or Shade. Inflorescence with waxy yellow-orange tubular flowers protruding from each bright orange bract. Hummingbird attractor! Extremely hardy & easy to grow in garden or containers.

Cheilocostus speciosus Flower – Crepe Ginger 5' PS FS S Ruffled white bloom appears with the texture of crepe paper. Bees & other pollinators love to explore the flower for its nectar.

Costus 'Green Mountain' - Spiral Ginger 4' PS FS Floriferous spiral ginger blooms from late spring through fall with pinkish-orange bracts tipped in green and golden yellow flowers. Loves rich organic soil and shady garden spots. Can be used as an ever-flowering container plant or as a garden plant, if protected in the winter from freezes and wet soil. Created by Tim Chapman. Hummingbird attractor!

Costus 'Pina Colada' - Spiral Ginger 4' PS FS Delightful small Costus with a beautiful inflorescence! A rosette of soft pink top bracts mature to blush pink bracts that are framed in soft green tips. Coral orange tubular flowers emerge from each bract making this quite an eye-catching whorl of color. Hummingbirds love to sip nectar from the tubular flowers. Compact growth habit and truly free-flowering! Small size makes it easy to grow & bloom in a container too. Will freeze to the ground but will return from its roots in late spring. Hybridized by Jim Conyers.

Costus woodsonii 'Dwarf French Kiss' Spiral Ginger 4' PS FS S This Costus has a dwarf, compact growth habit. The foliage is shiny with an oval shape. Inflorescence appears at the tip of the stem with red bracts and tubular orange-red flowers. This plant works well in landscapes as well as sunny interior scapes. It is often planted en masse in Florida landscapes because of its hardiness and sun loving attributes. In our area, it may need to be protected from frost in the first year until it is mature. Attracts hummingbirds and butterflies. Flowers are deliciously edible and taste peppery. Salt tolerant.

Costus 'Tropicais' - Spiral Ginger 4' PS Very rare Costus in the U.S. yet very easy to grow and hardy!!!! Tropical plant from Central & South America. Leaves are spirally arranged around the stem like a spiral staircase. Floriferous all summer and throughout the fall! Bright red inflorescence bears charming pale pink tubular flowers. Super Hummingbird Attractor!!

Costus fissiligulatus – African Princess Costus 3' – 4' PS FS Tropical, small, & erect, it flowers easily in the warm summer months. Blossoms are large for the Costus family growing to 3” wide with pink trumpet shaped flowers and bright yellow throats. In autumn, keikis are formed at the base of the inflorescence. These can easily be snapped off and propagated. Easily grown in a large container.