



Humans have had a connection with gingers for thousands of years. *Zingiber officinale* has been cultivated for at least 2,000 years, and is included in 2nd century BC Roman books of cooking and farming. It has always been considered a highly valued spice. Turmeric spice evolved from *Curcuma longa* ginger, and has an even longer history — over 4,000 years. These two ginger species alone have provided edible, folkloric, herbal, and medicinal value for most of the recorded history of mankind.

In Victorian England, gingers were grown for their flamboyant and sometimes beautifully perfumed flowers in greenhouses, but in time the plants fell victim to increased heating costs, ending the tropical plant craze. Recent interest in tropical plants has once again brought gingers to the forefront. This versatile group can be used in many different tropical-style settings. They can be an accent in woodland gardens, around ponds, in borders, with shrubs or under trees. Gardeners in the Upper Texas Gulf Coast of Texas are fortunate to be able to cultivate an amazing array of gingers.

Alpinia

Alpinia (Al-PIN-ee-uh)

Named in honor of the 16th century botanist Prospero Apinio, *Alpinia* is the largest genus in the Zingiberaceae family, with more than 230 species. Most species originate in Southeast Asia, and most varieties are tropical and sensitive to cold. Alpinias bloom in the second year of growth, but even if the bloom is absent, the foliage is striking.

Shell Ginger

A. zerumbet (zer-UM-bet)

Shell ginger is the largest of the root-hardy Alpinias, growing to eight to 10 feet. It blooms on the previous year's canes. The foliage, noted for its beauty, is often aromatic. Shell ginger requires light sun to shade and adequate moisture.

Variegated shell ginger is grown as a foliage plant and is the most popular variegated ginger. A dwarf version is also available.



Shell Ginger



Variegated Shell Ginger

Costus

Costus (KOS-tus)

Costus, with at least 70 species, is the largest of the Costaceae family. These plants have leaves arranged in a spiral around a stem that grows from six to 10 feet tall. Some varieties attract hummingbirds, and others attract bees. *Costus* gingers need three to five hours of direct sun, along with fertile, organic, moist, and well-drained soil. They do not like standing in water. *Costus* is the only ginger that can be propagated by stem cuttings. However, the most common way is by rhizome division.

Crepe Ginger

C. speciosus (spee-see-OH-sus)

There are two distinct varieties of crepe ginger. One has a red/burgundy pinecone-shaped flower at the top. Another is called variegated crepe ginger and has white blooms resembling crepe fabric. Crepe Ginger can also be grown as a container plant, growing five to seven feet and producing its best blooms in full sun.

Red Tower

C. barbatus (bar-BAY-tus)

This plant produces a combination of red bracts and yellow flowers. It blooms in the spring. It can grow in filtered shade, reaching a height of seven feet and is sensitive to frost.

Spiral Ginger

C. woodsii (wood-SO-nee)

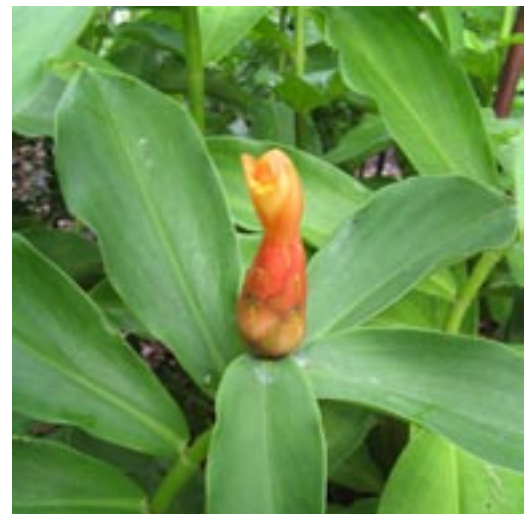
This spiral ginger grows to 24 to 36 inches tall in sun or partial shade and blooms all year. Flower tips produce a honey-like ginger nectar attractive to bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. This plant is cold hardy to 30°F.



Crepe Ginger



Red Tower



Spiral Ginger



Alimanda

Curcuma

Curcuma (KER-koo-muh)

Native to Southeast Asia, curcumas, also called hidden gingers, are used as spices, vegetables, coloring agents, perfumes, oils, and medicines. They are also widely grown as ornamentals.

There are spring and summer curcumas. The spring variety blooms before the leaves appear. The summer curcumas bloom from summer until early fall and has leaves taller than the flower stem, obscuring the flower. Curcumas are superb foliage plants, with tough, banana-like leaves that turn yellow and begin to drop in the fall. Curcumas foliage can be protected from the sun by planting it in light shade. Keep the soil evenly moist, and plants will grow from one to seven feet tall. Most propagation is by rhizome division.

Alimanda

C. alimanda (al-ih-MAN-da)

This hidden ginger has a reddish/orange bloom and prefers shade. It is an excellent cut flower and stays fresh for an extended period.



Purple Prince

Purple Prince

C. 'Purple Prince'

Curcuma 'Purple Prince' is a hybrid and grows two to three feet tall. It prefers light shade to some sun and produces beautiful foot-long flower stalks with maroon bracts and smaller flowers in late summer.

Giant Plume Ginger

C. elata (el-AH-tuh)

The flower stalk develops into a brilliant bright pink torch before the banana-like leaves emerge. At heights up to eight feet, this is the tallest and one of the hardiest curcumas cultivated. Bright filtered light and well-drained soil are recommended.



Giant Plume Ginger

Globba

Globba (GLAH-buh)

The genus consists of 40 to 100 species. Globbas are rarely more than 24 inches tall, with inch-long flowers. The plant is quite distinctive and ornamental as the dangling flowers swing and sway in even a light breeze, appearing to be dancing. Globbas require moisture and a well-drained soil. They prefer shade or part shade, though some have been seen blooming and thriving in full sun. They die to the ground in the fall and don't re-emerge until late spring. Propagation is by stem cutting (place it horizontally in a vase of water and watch for emerging sprouts), clump division during the growing season, and by cutting and planting dormant rhizome pieces. These gingers spread naturally when their beige-white bulbils fall to the ground and appear the following season as a plant.

Mauve Dancing Lady

G. winitii (win-IT-ee-eye)

This plant reaches two feet and has purple bracts with yellow flowers. It is excellent as a cut flower and lasts for weeks in a floral arrangement. It needs moist soil, some shade, and good drainage.

Purple Globe Ginger

G. globulifera (GLOB-yoo-LIF-era)

This is an 18 to 24-inch shade lover, with purple blooms all summer. The long-lasting flowers can be used in floral arrangements. Light shade is suggested, as well as consistent soil moisture.

Yellow Dancing Lady

G. schomburgkii (shom-BURG-key-eye)

This easy-to-grow ginger is readily available at nurseries. It grows to three feet high in light or dappled shade, but can take some direct sun. Well-drained soil high in organic matter is recommended.



Mauve Dancing Lady



Purple Globe Ginger



Yellow Dancing Lady

Hedychium

Hedychium (*hed-EE-kee-um*)

Hedychium gets its name “butterfly ginger” because of the shape of its flowers. This genus consists of 50 species today; all but one are native to southeastern Asia. Thanks to its delightful fragrance, this is a popular ginger to humans, butterflies and moths. On the Upper Gulf Coast of Texas, butterfly ginger blooms from summer into fall.

Partial shade to full sun is recommended for butterfly gingers. They are more tolerant of full sun and wet (poorly drained) soil than other gingers, and thrive here and tolerant conflict. These are the first gingers to emerge in the spring, reaching a height of three to eight feet. Plants bloom on new growth, so stems should be cut back to ground level at the end of their growing season.

Propagation is by root cuttings (horizontally placed on the ground, and covered with two inches of leaf mulch) or stem-cuttings. It is such a hardy ginger that some consider this plant to be invasive.



Orange Bottlebrush Ginger

Orange Bottlebrush Ginger

H. coccinium (*kok-SIN-ee-em*)

Common in the Upper Gulf Coast of Texas, orange bottlebrush originated in the Himalayas. Tall, symmetrical-looking plants grow from six to 10 feet and bloom from late summer until October. The bright red-orange flowers are fragrant, attracting both hummingbirds and butterflies. Give orange bottlebrush sun to partial shade and well-drained soil high in organic matter.

Variegated Butterfly Ginger

H. 'Dr. Moy' (*Dock-tore MO-ee*)

This variegated butterfly ginger was hybridized by retired botanist Dr. Ying Doon Moy of San Antonio. Partial sun and well-drained soil high in organic matter are recommended. This ginger will grow four to five feet tall. It has a large, slightly fragrant flower head that is peach-orange with a darker orange in the center.



Variegated Butterfly Ginger

White Butterfly Ginger

H. coronarium (kor-ob-NAR-ee-um)

This is the most frequently cultivated and best known of the ornamental gingers, and it adds a tropical look to gardens with its beautiful white flowers appearing towards the top of eight foot stalks. The flower produces a deep gardenia-like fragrance, especially in the evening, attracting sphinx moths. Butterflies are attracted to the flower. Plant in full sun only if water is abundant; otherwise, brown leaf tips and curled leaves may develop. This plant may need staking if the flower heads get too heavy.

Yellow Butterfly Ginger

H. flavescens (flav-ES-enz)

This ginger has dark green foliage. It is the hardiest of all gingers. The flowers are light yellow with darker yellow centers. Yellow butterfly ginger prefers part shade with well-drained soil high in organic matter. It tends to lean and arch as it grows to six to eight feet and may need to be staked. As the clump becomes larger, it will support itself.



White Butterfly Ginger



Yellow Butterfly Ginger

Kaempferia

Kaempferia (kamp-FER-ee-uh)

Kaempferia, also known as peacock ginger, is a native of Asia and China. The genus has about 50 species grown primarily for their decorative foliage instead of their flowers. Several species are grown for medicinal value. The dramatically patterned and colorful leaves give them their name. Kaempferias range in size from prostrate to two feet. They are grown in partial shade, though some varieties thrive in partial sun. Dormant in winter, kaempferia emerges in May and blooms until fall. Some kaempferias bloom in spring before the leaves emerge. One ginger expert discussing kaempferias said, "Plant it high or watch it die!" Some call kaempferia the South's hosta.

Grande

K. 'Grande' (GRAN-day)

This 24 inch tall ginger has beautiful, sturdy eight-inch wide leaves and violet and white flowers that burst forth in late spring before the foliage emerge. Flowers are the largest in the genus. 'Grande' needs shade and moist, well-drained soil. It is dormant in winter. Leaves are similar to silver spot.

Silver Spot

K. pulchra (PUL-kruh)

Silver spot is a low-growing ginger, no more than half a foot tall. It has tough six-inch broad leaves that are dark green with bands of silver across them. After the leaves appear in late spring, lavender flowers begin to bloom and continue until fall. Partial to full shade is recommended, along with evenly moist soil.

Tropical Crocus, Resurrection Lily

K. rotunda (ro-TUN-duh)

The flowers of this ginger emerge from the ground before any foliage, thus giving it its name 'crocus'. This is an erect, two foot species, inappropriate as a groundcover. Tropical crocus prefers shade and moist well-drained soil.



Silver Spot



Tropical Crocus

Zingiber

Zingiber (*Zing-ee-ber*)

The genus *Zingiber*, also known as culinary ginger, has up to 150 species native to Asia. Most are tropical or subtropical. *Zingiber* has been cultivated for at least 2,000 years. In addition to culinary uses, different species of *zingiber* are used for medicinal purposes around the world. In the United States, gardeners know it best as the culinary ginger used to add spicy flavor to foods. The rhizome is the edible portion.

Edible Ginger

Z. officinale (*oh-fiss-ih-NAH-lee*)

This is the ginger that is most commonly used in cooking. The rhizomes can be planted, but plants grown from store-bought rhizomes will vary widely. Plants are hardy, but need full sun, good drainage, and fertile soil. It takes about 12 months from planting a rhizome to the harvest. A balanced fertilizer such as 13-13-13 is recommended during the growth period. This plant can reach three feet.

Pinecone Ginger, Shampoo Ginger

Z. zerumbet (*ZER-um-bet*)

Known as pinecone ginger in the southern United States for the flower's resemblance to a pine cone, it is known elsewhere as shampoo ginger because the pine cone oozes a sticky, milky residue that is used as shampoo by some native cultures. It is also used in some modern, commercial shampoos. As an ornamental, the leaf stalk reaches about six feet. Flower spikes emerge from the ground. Grown in partial shade to full sun, it should be planted in well-drained soil high in organic matter. This pinecone ginger provides superb, long-lasting cut flower spikes for floral arrangements.



Edible Ginger



Pinecone Ginger

Gingers

COMMON/BOTANICAL NAME	HEIGHT	LIGHT	BLOOMING CYCLE
Shell Ginger / <i>A. zerumbet</i>	4 to 8 feet	sun to partial shade	late spring/early summer
Crepe Ginger / <i>C. speciosus</i>	6 to 10 feet	3 to 5 hours of direct sun	spring
Red Tower / <i>Costus barbatus</i>	6 to 8 feet	full sun	mid-spring till mid-summer
Spiral Ginger / <i>Costus woodsii</i>	24 to 36 feet	sun to partial shaded	mid-spring till mid-summer
Alimanda / <i>C. alimanda</i>	2 to 8 feet	light shade	summer till early fall
C. 'Purple Prince'	2 to 3 feet	part shade	summer
Giant Plume Ginger / <i>C. elata</i>	2 to 3 feet	sun to partial shade	mid-summer
Mauve Dancing Lady / <i>G. winitii</i>	1.5 to 2 feet	filtered sun, some full sun	summer till fall
Purple Globe Ginger / <i>G. Globulifera</i>	1.5 to 2 feet	partial to full shade	summer
Yellow Dancing Lady / <i>G. schomburgkii</i>	2 to 3 feet	bright indirect sunlight	summer
Orange Bottlebush Ginger / <i>H. coccinium</i>	6 to 10 feet	part shade to medium sun	late summer into fall
Variagated Butterfly Ginger / <i>H. 'Dr. Moy'</i>	2 to 3 feet	full sun to partial shade	late summer till fall
White Butterfly Ginger / <i>H. coronarium</i>	4 to 6 feet	full sun to partial shade	mid-summer till early fall
Yellow Butterfly Ginger / <i>H. flavescens</i>	4 to 6 feet	full sun to partial shade	mid-summer till fall
Grande / <i>K. 'Grande'</i>	a few inches to 2 feet	partial shade, some partial sun	May till fall
Silver Spot / <i>K. pulchra</i>	a few inches to 2 inches	light shade	summer into fall
Tropical Crocus / <i>K. rotunda</i>	1.5 to 2 feet	full sun to partial or filtered shade	late spring till early summer
Edible ginger / <i>Z. officinale</i>	up to 3 feet	full sun	12 months till harvest
Pinecone Ginger / <i>Z. zerumbet</i>	up to 6 feet	partial shade to full sun	root is used peeled, chopped or dried