

Ginger

GWF452
Updated Jan 09

This root is slow to sprout, but it is easy to grow.

Ginger is a tropical plant with lush, dark-green leaves. It grows about 1.5m tall. In the summer, the plant produces a beautiful pink flower spike, nearly a metre tall. When the flower dies down at the end of the summer, you can dig up the roots and use them for cooking. These roots are used to flavour cakes, biscuits, ice cream and ginger beer, and are used a great deal in exotic foreign cooking.

How to grow a ginger plant

This plant might prove tricky to start off, but once it gets going, it is quite easy to grow. One of the problems, however, with growing your own ginger is finding a good root to grow from. The ones you buy in supermarkets have often been treated so that they don't grow on the shelf, and this means they won't grow for you either! Also, the root is often too dried out to grow again.

Try to find a good greengrocer or delicatessen who sells very fresh produce, and look for roots that have shoots already on them. Only choose roots that feel firm and show no sign of drying up or damage. You do not need a very large piece of root - just a few nobbles and a shoot.

Fill a 15cm pot with multi-purpose compost, making sure

that there are drainage holes in the bottom.

Plant the root 3cm deep and water in well. Put the pot in a clear plastic bag - this is to ensure the compost does not dry out - and put the pot in a very warm place. A heated airing cupboard is ideal. The root will take a few weeks to shoot, but it will need to be checked every day for signs of growth. If the compost looks at all dry during this period, make sure you give it a little more water.

When the shoot appears, move the pot to a warm, bright windowsill away from direct sunlight. Ginger does not like direct sunlight. As the plant grows, replot it using the same compost as before. When it grows taller, it may get floppy so tie it to a cane with soft string.

Caring for your ginger plant

If you plant the ginger root in spring, it should be in flower by July. Ginger prefers to be in a warm room or in a bright conservatory. The best place to put the plant is in a sunny part of the room, but don't position your ginger too close to a window.

Ginger does not like to dry out and its compost should always be kept moist. Water your ginger plant regularly and feed every two weeks with a general houseplant food. From May to July, you can encourage the flowers by feeding the plant with tomato food instead.

By the end of the summer, the plant will die down and become dormant. This is when you can harvest the roots, to use for cooking or making tea. If you don't want to eat them, you can always grow the root again the following year. Cut down the plant, but leave the root in its pot. Don't start watering it again until the spring.

