Alpinia zerumbet ‘Variegata’ Variegated Shellflower

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Introduction
Variegated ginger is a 4- to 8-foot-tall herbaceous perennial that is used in the landscape for its attractive foliage and shell-like flowers (Figure 1). The leaves of this plant are green and yellow variegated and are quite striking. They are 18 to 24 inches long and have a distinct, spicy fragrance. The white, fragrant flowers of the variegated ginger are borne in drooping clusters toward the stem ends. These fascinating flowers appear periodically throughout the year on the heavily foliated stems. The fruits are long, red capsules but are inconspicuous.

General Information
Scientific name: *Alpinia zerumbet* ‘Variegata’
Pronunciation: al-PIN-ee-uh zair-um-BET
Common name(s): variegated shell flower, variegated ginger
Family: Zingiberaceae
Plant type: herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Figure 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: specimen; border; mass planting; accent; suitable for growing indoors; cut flowers
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Figure 1. Variegated ginger.

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
**Description**

Height: 4 to 7 feet  
Spread: 5 to 8 feet  
Plant habit: upright  
Plant density: open  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: coarse

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: spiral  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire  
Leaf shape: oblong  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: fragrant  
Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches  
Leaf color: variegated  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: white  
Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; flowers periodically throughout the year

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: round  
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches  
Fruit cover: dry or hard  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
Current year stem/twig color: green  
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

**Culture**

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun  
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Soil salt tolerance: poor  
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

**Other**

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk  
Winter interest: no special winter interest  
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive  
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

**Use and Management**

Variegated ginger is an excellent specimen plant, but can also be used in containers. It will make a nice accent plant in a shrub border or by a building entrance. This perennial stands out in any landscape and will delight passersby.

Place this perennial in full sun or partial shade. It will perform well in moist, fertile soils that are well drained. Variegated ginger is not very drought tolerant, wilting badly in full summer sun without irrigation. A partial shaded location or regular irrigation prevents this. In cold areas in northern Florida, the stems of this plant will be frozen to the ground, but new shoots will reemerge in the spring.

The matted clumps of this plant can be divided for propagation. Dig the plant any time and break the clumps apart with your hands. The stems can be removed or left on the rhizome which can be planted in a new location.

**Pests and Diseases**

There are no pests or diseases of major concern. Mites are a minor problem.