

Costus speciosus 'Variegatus' Variegated Crepe Ginger¹

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Introduction

The large, soft, variegated leaves of this tropical evergreen are borne on red stems emerging directly from the ground (Fig.1). Each leaf has a narrow white strip along each margin with occasional light streaks through the blade. They alternate in a spiralling fashion around the stem, forming attractive, arching clumps arising from underground rootstocks. Plants reach 6 to 8 feet tall, with the tallest stems occasionally falling over and lying on the ground. Beautiful, 1.5-inch diameter, white flowers are produced in the warm months, appearing on cone-like heads at the tips of branches.



Figure 1. Variegated crepe ginger.

General Information

Scientific name: *Costus speciosus* 'Variegatus'

Pronunciation: KOS-tus spee-see-OH-sus

Common name(s): variegated crepe ginger, variegated spiral flag

Family: *Costaceae*

Plant type: perennial

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 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; container or above-ground planter; mass planting; cascading down a wall; accent

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 6 to 8 feet

Spread: 3 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright; spreading

Plant density: open

Growth rate: moderate

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Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches

Leaf color: variegated

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: less than .5 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: reddish

Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Growing in either sun or partial shade, crepe ginger needs fertile soil and ample moisture, and is often planted near water. Plants receiving regular fertilization often look the best. It makes a nice accent plant in a shrub border, where the variegated foliage will contrast the greens of the shrub border. Planted on 3- to 4-foot-centers, it forms a loose, open mass of foliage, and can brighten a partially shaded location. Foliage can burn up in full day sun.

Propagation is by division of the clumps, cuttings, or by separating the offsets or plantlets that form below the flower heads.

Pests and Diseases

Mites and nematodes can be a problem, especially on light, sandy soil.