

Alpinia zerumbet 'Variegata' Variegated Shellflower¹

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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.



Figure 1. Variegated ginger.

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 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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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.