

## ***Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata': Variegated Shell Ginger, Variegated Shellflower<sup>1</sup>**

Keighly Graves, Wendy Wilber, Tom A. Wichman, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein<sup>2</sup>

<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

*This document is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman.*

### **Introduction**

Variegated shell ginger is an herbaceous perennial that grows 4 to 7 feet tall in an upright growth habit. The large, 18- to 24-inch leaves of this plant have striking green and yellow variegated coloration (Figure 1). The white, fragrant flowers of the variegated ginger are borne in drooping clusters toward the stem ends (Figure 2). These fascinating flowers appear periodically throughout the year on heavily foliated stems. The fruits are long, red capsules but are inconspicuous (Figure 3). This plant's ornamentally interesting foliage and shell-like flowers make it an excellent specimen or accent plant, as well as being suitable for mass planting, borders (Figure 4), or as a houseplant. The flowers may also be used as cut flowers in arrangements.



Figure 1. Leaf—*Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata': Variegated shell ginger foliage.

Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower—*Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata': Variegated shell ginger flower cluster.

Credit: niltonemaia via Adobe Stock



Figure 3. Fruit—*Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata': Variegated shell ginger fruit.

Credit: © mountaingirlhk, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Full form—*Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata': Variegated shell ginger full form.

Credit: Feng via Adobe Stock

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata'

**Pronunciation:** al-PIN-ee-uh zair-um-BET 'var-E-got-ah'

**Common name(s):** variegated shellflower, variegated shell ginger

**Family:** Zingiberaceae

**Plant type:** herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9B through 11B (Figure 5 and 6)

## USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

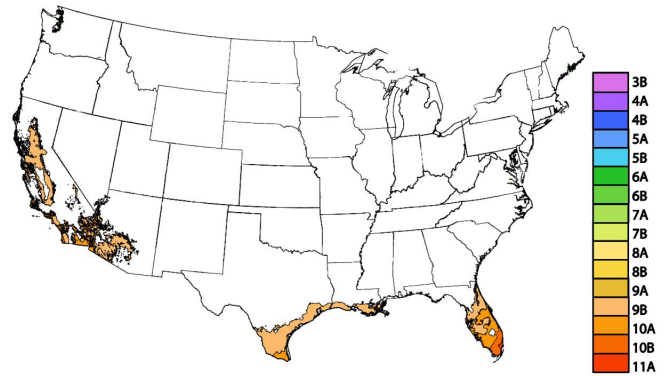


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A, 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

## USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

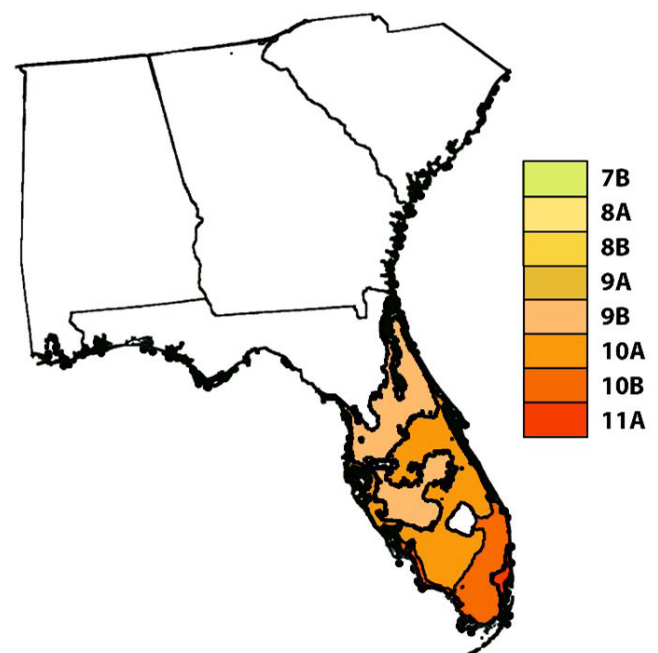


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A, 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

**Planting month for zone 9:** year-round

**Planting month for zones 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

## 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 when crushed; evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 18 to 36 inches

**Leaf color:** yellow; green; variegated

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** white; orange; yellow

**Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; flowers periodically throughout the year; showy; flowers borne in clusters

## 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 partial shade

**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 (rhizomes)

**Winter interest:** evergreen foliage adds winter interest

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

## Use and Management

Variegated shell ginger is an excellent specimen plant but may also be used in containers. It makes a nice accent plant in a shrub border or by a building entrance. This perennial stands out in any landscape due to its ornamentally interesting leaves and fragrant shell-like flowers.

Variegated shell ginger performs well when planted in locations with partial shade and moist, fertile, well-drained soils. Variegated shell ginger is moderately drought tolerant but may require additional irrigation during drought conditions. In the colder areas of northern Florida, the stems of this plant will be frozen to the ground, but new shoots will reemerge in the spring.

Propagation is via division of rhizomes during the active growing season.

## Design Considerations

With its large, lush, and strikingly variegated green and yellow leaves, shell ginger lends a cool, tropical feel to the landscape. Its bold foliage and delicate, shell-like flowers make it an excellent choice as a specimen or accent, though it is also well-suited for mass plantings, borders, or as a houseplant.



To create visual interest, contrast its smooth, broad leaves with plants of a finer texture, such as soft, mounding shrubs with small leaves or the thin blades of ornamental grasses. Companion plants with dark green or burgundy leaves will accentuate the ginger's bright variegation. For flowering companions, pair it with tones of purple, burgundy, and blue. When shell ginger is used in a mass

planting, place large groupings of companion plants at its base to create a full, layered effect.

### **Pests and Diseases**

Minor pest issues include mites. No diseases of major concern.

<sup>1</sup> This document is FPS036, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 1999. Revised May 2007 and November 2025. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit [FloridaFriendlyLandscaping.com](https://FloridaFriendlyLandscaping.com).*

<sup>2</sup> Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Wendy Wilber, statewide Master Gardener Program coordinator and Extension agent IV; Tom A. Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Claire Lewis, state specialized agent II and director Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Environmental Horticulture; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, Department of Environmental Horticulture; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.