

## GINGER CARE PAGE

Slightly slower to get going than cannas but wonderful plants just the same, in flower nothing can touch them, the size and strong honeysuckle smell of the flower heads is something else, very popular in Victorian times and making a comeback. Hedychium have spiky foliage similar to the culinary ginger, *Zingiber Officinale*, and sometimes a distinct ginger smell to their rhizomes, but have much more spectacular flowers. A hedychium plant has two types of stem; the first is the rhizome running at or just below soil surface. The second is the leafy shoots that emerge above ground and carry the unusual blue-green leaves that make hedychium an attractive foliage plant even when not in flower. The flowers are borne from mid-summer to the first frosts, the fabulous spicy fragrance of some varieties adds to the tropical look and feel of the plant. They make good cut flowers.

Hedychium vary from frost hardy to tender green house or conservatory subjects, and even some of the hardy types, flower best under protection in colder areas. It is possible to enhance cold tolerance by planting deep in the first year. The rhizomes are happiest at about ground level, and the plants tend to adjust themselves quite quickly, a mulch will help protect against the worst of the winter cold. Hedychium can be planted in zone 9 and many are hardy enough to be planted outside in Zone 8 with some thought.

The tolerance of plants to cold temperatures is influenced by many factors. In the UK plants tend to succumb in the winter to damp-induced rotting rather than the cold; keeping plants dry can greatly improve their chances of survival. The effects of micro climate can give small areas of a garden, better conditions than others, such as a south or west wall face. It is possible to cheat by having patio containers, and putting the plants inside, a cold or heated area for the winter, though when in growth they must be well watered and fed. To protect plants in situ, fleece or bubble wrap can be used, for permanent plantings straw, leaves or sacking can be used as mulch. A raised bed will help winter wetness or a generally free draining area or soil such as sand. General fertilizer can be used as hedychium are heavy feeders, and when in growth, should be well watered especially containerized plants. The key to success with these plants is experimentation; some help is available on our UK hardiness guide map page to see what sort of temperature area you are in, though this does have some variation year on year, and most coastal regions are zone 9 including the south East such as Brighton and Eastbourne.

Generally speaking it would be recommended for northern regions of the UK, other than warmer coastal areas, to plant all the hedychium varieties in full sun if used in permanent plantings outside, and give them a deep mulch in the autumn. If kept in pots and inside a conservatory or glass house over the winter the flowering period starts earlier, if inside over the summer they must have some shade.

Southern and western areas, there are some varieties that can in a permanent planting, be in full sun to full shade, with a good winter mulch. There are some varieties which just flower too late in the year, to open before the frost arrives. Some coastal areas may get a flower or two if it is mild, though it may still be the case that they will be best kept in a pot and moved inside to flower, before the colder weather arrives, to get the best display. Plants used in a conservatory or glass house in summer will need shade.

Proprietor - Kevin Clift.