Description

Alpinia zerumbet or ‘Shell Ginger’ is a fabulous and cold hardy ginger. Years ago I saw this growing and flowering at Melbourne Zoo, and it should be hardier even in colder areas of Australia.

This ginger puts out gracefully arching sprays of delicate flowers resembling white sea shells, tipped pink with a red and yellow throat. It predominantly flowers during spring and summer, but will flower intermittently year round in warmer areas.

It flowers best if give a few hours of direct sun, but will happily grow even in partial shade. Even without flowers, the foliage is very attractive, and it makes a good screening plant.

Shell Ginger can grow to up to 8 feet or more in ideal conditions, but is usually less, particularly outside of the tropics and sub-tropics. Like all tropicals, it likes soil which is rich in organic matter, and moist but well drained. Regular feeding with a balanced fertilizer will keep it healthy. Whilst it likes a moderate amount of water, it will tolerate fairly dry conditions once established.

This plant usually has few pest problems, but the leaves will brown on the edges if the soil is not kept moist or if touched by frost.

At a glance:

Suitable for Zones: 8 - 12 (see my Zone Hardiness map page in my eBay store)
Sun requirements: Full sun to partial shade (up to 50% shade)
Flowering times: Spring/Summer, year round in warmer areas
Moisture requirements: Moderate to high, well drained soil, although is moderately drought tolerant once established
Size when fully grown: 1.5 to 2.5 metres (4 - 8 feet), similar spread wide
Reasonably frost tolerant
Suitable as an indoor plant? No
Suitable as a container plant? Yes
May go dormant in winter in very cold areas

Planting instructions

Please plant as soon as possible after you receive the rhizome.

We recommend establishing your plant in a pot, before planting in the garden.

Your rhizome may have leaves, or the leaves may have been partially or completely removed to aid the plant's health during travel. If the leaves have been completely removed, the rhizome should still have growing 'buds' or new shoots as well as the leaf stem.

The rhizome should be planted with the top (leaf stem/new shoots/buds pointing upwards) no more than 3-4 cm under the soil. New shoots or larger buds should be above the soil. You can often look at the rhizome and see where the soil line had been while it was growing.
It is very important not to plant the rhizome too deep, as this will invite fungi and cause root rot. Freshly planted rhizomes need oxygen to grow new roots and will die if the planting medium is too dense or too wet.

After planting, water thoroughly, then do not water again until soil is getting dry. Keep evenly moist, but not wet, when shoots to grow and leaves start to unfold.

If planted in pots, these should be of sufficient size - at least 10 to 15 cm wider than rhizome size. Keep the pots in a warm, sunny place. When leaves start to unfold the plants can be planted out - again in well drained soil.

A slow release fertilizer is ideal in the beginning. Larger and already established plants require more fertilizing and more water.