

WILD GINGERS OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

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The tropical rain forests of Andaman and Islands harbouring 4 species of medicinal and aromatic wild gingers namely *Zingiber odoriferum* Bl., *Z. spectabile* Griff., *Z. squarrosum* Roxb. and *Z. zerumbet* Rosc. ex. Sm., which are generally found growing in shady humid places. Most of these wild gingers are possessing an eye-catching, colourful bracts in ovoid, conical or cylindrical spikes and are exhilarating the horticulturists to grow them as ornamental and decorative herbs in the gardens. These herbs are also being used for therapeutical purposes like that of the common, well-known ginger *Zingiber officinale* Rosc., a medicinal and a flavouring agent.

Key words : Wild ginger, *Zingiber odoriferum*, *Z. spectabile*, *Z. squarrosum*, *Z. zerumbet*, medicinal, flavouring agent

Zingiber odoriferum Bl. is a terrestrial, aromatic herb with 2-3 leaves in clumps, 3m and above in length. Leaflets sub-opposite, 25-30 pairs, spikes conical, crimson-red turning greenish-red upto 50 cm long. The dark red pouch like bracts are basally white, spoon shaped, acuminate, embedding with solitary cream-yellow flower on the bracteoles with mucilage. Corolla white or pale yellow. The seeds are black, like beads, ellipsoid 0.6 × 0.3 cm with carunaculate base, can be collected after 2 months of its flowering during Aug-Oct. Spike turns to dark brown then fully ripen. The stem juice is being used as a tranquiliser for honeybee.

Zingiber spectabile Griff. is a robust, aromatic herb, leaves in clumps of more than 2 m long. Leaflets 20-25 pairs. The spike is erect, cylindrical upto 40 cm long, Bracts scarlet in honeycomb form, turning to red when ripen. The solitary pale yellow flowers bloom for a day, lies in between the primary yellow bracts and the secondary bracteoles. Fruit is cylindrical, covered with bracteoles in the pouch. Black beady eyes like ellipsoid seeds can be collected after 2 months of its flowering. Fruit wall remains persistent when dry. It can be grown as an ornamental herb.

Z. squarrosum Roxb. is a robust herb, 2.0-2.5 m tall; rhizome is covered with mucronate red sheaths. Leaves broadly lanceolate, acuminate, wavy

margins, 35-50 cm long. Spikes obovate upto 8 cm long, bracts red pubescent, calyx tubular, pink, pubescent, corolla white, unequal, pubescent, pale red; flowering during Aug-Oct. The petioles are chewed when thirsty by the trial 'Onges'.

Zingiber zerumbet Rosc. ex. Sm. is an aromatic herb, 1.3 m in thick upto 1.5 m in height bearing 20-30 sessile leaflets. Spike conical or ovoid on stalks of 3-40 cm long clothed with long appressed obtuse greenish sheaths. Bracts of 2-4 cm are obovate with rounded apex and pale membranous margin, bright green at first and becoming red when fruiting. Flowers pale sulphur yellow. Seeds black, ellipsoid, oblong 2.5 mm × 4.0 mm. The rhizome is used like that of *Z. officinale* Rosc. a hot remedy for cough, asthma, worms, leprosy and other skin diseases. Boiled rhizome is given in pulmonary infections.

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