

GROWING GINGER IN THE HOME GARDEN

(By Officers of Horticulture Branch DPI)

GINGER is a versatile spice as it can be used green, grated into stews and casseroles, dried and ground, and used in curries.

It can also be syruped to give delicious confectionery products such as preserved ginger. In addition, ginger makes delicious jam.

To produce good quality ginger, cultural practices, time of planting and harvesting are fairly exacting.

The garden soil should be loose and friable, offering minimum resistance to the development of the ginger rhizome. Good drainage is important as the plant will not tolerate water-logging.

The garden bed should receive the maximum amount of sunlight and be sheltered from hot, drying winds.

PREPARING THE BED

The garden bed should be prepared in winter. Well-rotted animal or poultry manure, if available, is very beneficial and should be incorporated during the preparation of the bed.

An application of lime or dolomite may be necessary to raise the soil pH to the most favourable level of 6.0. (The soil should be worked to a fine tilth. A few days before planting, the soil is formed into beds approximately 150 mm high and 1.5 m wide to accommodate four rows of plants.)

PLANTING MATERIAL

Portions of the underground rhizome known as 'seed pieces' are used as planting material. A piece

weighing between 50 and 80 grams is recommended for planting. The rhizome is carefully divided into pieces, care being taken to leave at least one eye or bud on the cutting. The cut pieces should be allowed to heal before planting to reduce the possibility of fungus infecting the tissue.

Seed can be used from an established patch of ginger or purchased from a supermarket where it is sold as green ginger.

PLANTING

September is the best time to plant. This allows the young plant to become well established before the onset of hot weather from October to December when plants are subject to sunburning.

A planting of about one square metre should yield about 6 kg of ginger rhizomes. This should give approximately 4.5 kg of the candied product, about the same weight as crystallized ginger.

The seed pieces are normally planted at 150 to 200 mm intervals and covered with 25 mm of soil.

FERTILIZING

Even when the soil has received a dressing of animal manure, a pre-plant application of 60 to 100 grams per square metre, depending on soil fertility, of a complete fertilizer mixture containing 10% nitrogen, 4% phosphorus and 6% potash should be applied.

The basal fertilizer can be broadcast over the beds, or drills are opened up along the proposed planting rows to a depth of 100 mm, and the fertilizer is applied along the base and sides of the drill and then covered over with soil.

Ginger benefits from regular side-dressings of nitrogen fertilizer. From early November and at monthly intervals thereafter until April, apply 10 grams of urea per square metre. The fertilizer should be watered-in immediately.

MULCHING

The ginger planting may be mulched with sawdust or blade grass. Mulching conserves soil moisture, it controls weed growth and the rhizomes are clean with a soft peel when harvested.

The mulch is applied as soon as the seed is planted. Sawdust should be spread 75 mm thick over the soil, and blade grass about double this thickness.

WATERING

The soil should be watered after planting and before any mulching material is applied. Until the young shoots appear, only light waterings will be necessary. Thereafter, water should be applied at regular intervals, depending on weather conditions, to maintain adequate soil moisture and keep the plants growing vigorously. However, over-watering should be avoided.

Young ginger plants are very susceptible to sunburning when temperatures exceed 32°C. When sunburning weather occurs, frequent very light waterings should be given, particularly between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. This establishes a micro-climate over the ginger, cooling both the air and soil. If the area is not too large, 50% shade cloth may be erected over it during October, November and December. This will eliminate sunburning.

HARVESTING

Ginger for use in confectionery and syruping is usually harvested from late February to mid March, before the rhizomes become too fibrous.

From early April onwards, the rhizomes become more fibrous and the ginger is then suitable for the manufacture of dried or ground ginger.

The new ginger is carefully dug out with a garden fork and the tops trimmed. The rhizomes are then scrubbed with a stiff brush before being prepared for confectionery processing.

Some roots may be left in the ground to be used as seed pieces for planting in the spring. Usually, the rhizomes are dug out in June or July and hung in hessian bags in the shade under shelter until required.

Information on the preservation and processing of ginger is contained in a leaflet available from the Sandy Trout Food Preservation Research Laboratory, Hamilton, Brisbane, Q. 4007.

Extract from Ingham Branch Newsletter June, 1989.