

# Growing Ginger at Homes

by Molly O'Boyle, Fairfax Master Gardener

If you like the taste or the healing properties of ginger, *Zingiber officinale*, you might want to try to grow it yourself.

A few years ago, I started to see organic ginger at some farmers markets in the Northern Virginia area. The flavor was stronger than store-bought even though the rhizomes were smaller. I was glad I bought some because I was then inspired by these farmers to grow the plants myself.



photo: Texas A&M University

When deciding to grow a ginger plant at home, you have the option of starter rhizomes to grow from organic or non-organic plants. When making your decision, you will have a few options to choose from your local grocery. Cost of organic groceries will be a higher starting point for you, if that is a concern. Other than organic, your ginger may have been irradiated, which will not allow sprouting or rooting. You can also order the rhizomes from reputable seed catalog companies.

The key to a successful ginger crop is to have multiple "eyes" on the rhizomes. Each individual eye will create a stem or roots for the growth of the plant. The best eyes for planting ginger will be swollen and ready to grow.



*Ginger buds or eyes*

The ginger plant is an herbaceous, tropical plant. It can be considered a perennial, flowering plant if grown in a tropical climate. Here, in Virginia, it is considered an annual plant, meaning it will only grow for one season. The foliage will freeze in cooler/colder temperatures of the Mid-Atlantic, around 55 degrees.

When prepping your rhizome for planting, cut into 1 to 1.5 inch (2 to 3 cm) lengths with at least two eyes per piece. You will want to keep these on the counter to 'heal' or 'callus' the cut ends. The callus will seal the rhizome from absorbing too much liquid once in the soil, which will lead to rot.

You can plant the rhizomes in loose soil in a garden bed or in a large pot. One piece of ginger per 12 inch (30 cm) pot is appropriate to allow for good growth. If in a bed, plant 6 to 8 inches (15 to 20 cm) apart and 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 cm) deep to allow them to spread in the soil. You will be able to tell these plants from your other vegetable plants in your garden because the ginger stem and leaves look very much like bamboo when growing. In longer growing climates, the plant will send out a flower; however, generally they do not flower in the Fairfax County area due to our shorter growing season.

The best sun exposure for ginger is part-sunny. You should use a light shade cover or partial shade in the heat of the afternoon for the best growth.

If you expect ginger to grow fast, you need to be patient. It could take many weeks for the rhizome to sprout. And, strangely enough, the rhizome does not need water/moisture or light to sprout. This is where patience comes in—they don't need a lot of care initially, so just let them be.

Once the plant sprouts, watering is key to success of your plant. You don't want to let the soil dry out AND you don't want to overwater, which will cause rot. Since these plants will be growing outside, be aware of rain amounts and spread out your own watering cycles accordingly. For example, one recent summer, we had 16 inches (40 cm) of rain in June and July. If your ginger is in a moveable pot, you might want to bring it under cover during the heavy rain cycles.

As far as fertilizing goes, you can add compost to the hole when you are planting the rhizome. It should last all season.



photo: Sanjun Gu, Virginia State University

*Plants without flowers (left) and with flowers (right)*

At harvest time, it is very easy to harvest when the plant dies back. You can harvest by tenderly pulling the ginger from the loose soil, cutting off the stems and letting the ends callus for a few days on newspaper or on a brown paper bag. When the temperatures get cooler, you can bring the pot inside and allow the rhizomes to get larger into the fall.

The one thing to remember about growing ginger: once you grow it, you will most likely want to grow it again because it tastes AMAZING! Good luck!

#### Recipes

- [Ginger Lemonade](#), Virginia Cooperative Extension
- [Green Papaya Salad with Ginger Dressing](#), Virginia Cooperative Extension

#### Resources

- [Growing Ginger At Home](#), Edward R. Olsen and Sanjun Gu, Virginia Cooperative Extension
- [Ginger - 2023 Herb of the Year](#), Karen Rohrbaugh, Penn State Extension
- [Growing Baby Ginger](#), Weekly Crop Update, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension