

## Curcuma domestica – Turmeric

*Curcuma domestica*, commonly known as Turmeric is a small, luscious leafy plant better known as the source of the curry additive and it also produces a spectacular flower that will thoroughly delight you. A plant without a stem, the overlapping clustered leaves appear to be growing out of a stem above ground. The leaves are blade-like, 20cm long by 8cm wide, and rise to about 50cm high, directly from the underground root. The cylindrical flower cluster is about 12 cm long. The pale yellow and white flowers grow on the lower pale green bract, while the upper pinkish part of the bract grows no flowers

This root/rhizome grows its leaves much as the banana does. The foliage will die back in the winter indicating it is ready for harvest.

In tropical India, turmeric is widely cultivated as a dye and as a spice, being the yellow color associated with curry powder, which is actually a mixture of spices that includes Turmeric. The root is thick and orange or yellow-colored on the inside. It is this bright color that is characteristic of turmeric. Dyes from these roots were used to color cloth. Young roots were steamed to provide a light yellow dye and the steamed older mature roots provided a golden or a deep orange dye. The juice of crushed raw roots produces stain also.

This plant likes rich soil, some shade and plenty of water. It is easily grown by rhizome. After the rhizomes are planted, it hides in the garden for three or more months and is usually dormant during the winter months, but the roots will revive to come up with green leaves once again, and then bloom. This species is best in a sub-tropical to warm temperate climate and is generally hardy to about  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

