

Ginger – Nature’s Buried Treasure

By Haley Turner

Ginger has long been used as a remedy for illness, from nausea relief and arthritis to migraines and high blood pressure. Traditional Chinese Medicine uses ginger as a warming food to counteract general cold or dampness in a person, which corresponds to sickness or slow digestion. Personal experience has proven the magic of ginger to be true as well: during my first trimester of pregnancy, the long days of morning sickness could only be alleviated with ginger. The form did not matter; fresh ginger root tea, ginger candy drops, and ginger beer (non-alcoholic) helped greatly. Current research is verifying different health effects of ginger as well, including antioxidant, anti-nausea, anti-cancer, and anti-inflammatory functions.^{1,2}

The **rhizome** is the edible part of the ginger plant, which can be eaten in many ways, some of which include fresh, dried and ground into a powder, pickled and consumed with sushi, or candied into a sweet snack.¹

Ginger thrives in temperatures between 70 – 90°F in slightly shaded areas. The friendliest climates where ginger thrives are typically tropical. However, it does well outdoors in any growing zone above eight, which is indicated on a plant hardiness map of the United States.³ These maps are easy to locate online and the zones correspond to the type of climate you live in as well as certain plants that grow well in that location. Overall, Tennessee’s climate experiences hot summers and mild winters. Nashville has a growing season of about 225 days, and Middle Tennessee sits around growing zone seven.⁴

Regardless of climate, ginger has a long growing season that lasts from about April to November, with a dormant season during the winter. With some extra work, ginger can be cultivated outdoors year-round. If the ground does not freeze more than an inch deep, you can simply mulch the ginger plant to keep it warm during the winter season. If the ground freezes more than this, you have two options: plant ginger in a large pot that stays outdoors during the growing season and can be transitioned inside during the winter, or plant ginger inside in a pot in the winter and transplant outside in the spring. Growing ginger in a pot year-round is the simplest method and is outlined below.

Steps for growing your own ginger indoors:

- In the springtime (April or May), break off a 1-2 inch piece of fresh, organic ginger purchased from the market that has budding green eyes.



<http://homeguides.sfgate.com/sprout-ginger-root-22624.html>

- In a large pot (about 5 gallons) plant the rhizome with budding eyes facing upwards about 4 inches deep in loose, sandy soil and cover with a layer of compost and mulch. Space each rhizome about 15 inches apart.
- Keep soil moist. Avoid over-watering, which can lead to mold and rot.
- Ginger has a dormant season in the winter, starting around November when the leaves turn yellow and fall off. Once this happens, dig up the rhizome and use in a recipe or store in a cool, dry place.
- Move pot indoors during winter when temperatures drop below 50 degrees and place near a window that lets in some light, but is partially shaded.
- Replant part of the rhizome to harvest next fall!³

This spice is incredibly versatile and can add a zing to many dishes. Try adding ginger to a smoothie, salad dressing, roasted vegetables, tea, lemonade, stir fries, or fresh fruit (see recipe below).

Fresh Ginger & Thyme Fruit Salad

Serves: 6

Ingredients:

2 cups peaches, chopped
1 cup nectarines, chopped
1 cup plums, chopped
1 cup blueberries
1 cup raspberries
1 Tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
1 Tablespoon fresh thyme

Instructions:

1. Mix all fruit in a large bowl
2. Add ginger and thyme. Toss to mix evenly throughout
3. Enjoy as a snack or side!

Nutrition Information: Calories: 69, Carbohydrate: 17 g, Fiber: 3.6 g, Total Fat: 0.5 g, Saturated Fat: 0 g, Protein: 1.4 g, Sodium: 0.6 mg

Haley Turner graduated from Bastyr University with a degree in nutrition and completed her internship at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. She is married with a new baby and moved to Nashville in 2016. In the future, her career plans include bringing together sustainable agriculture, education, and nutrition counseling. She believes healthy agricultural systems make healthy people, and is excited to help others discover different ways of enjoying whole foods.

References:

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