
Costus barbatus

Scientific Name

Costus barbatus Suessenguth

Synonyms

None recorded

Family

Costaceae

Common/English Names

Hawaiian Torch Ginger, Red Tower Ginger, Red Velvet Ginger, Spiral Ginger

Vernacular Names

Spanish: Apagafuego, Cana De Jabali, Sangrafu

Origin/Distribution

The species is a native of Costa Rica, Central America.

Agroecology

The plant grows well in full sun or partial shade in fertile, moist, well-drained, organic matter-rich soils. It blooms year round in the warm humid tropics. It tolerates cold temperatures but not frost. It is found from 600 to 1,600 m altitude in its natural habitat in Costa Rica.

Edible Plant Parts and Uses

Yellow flowers are edible (Carle 1995) and have a delightful sour lemony flavour. Flowers can be eaten straight off the plant and are excellent in a salad.

Botany

An erect, clumping herbaceous terrestrial with subterranean rhizome, growing to 1.5–2.5 m high. Ligule 10–30 mm, obtuse and lobed encircling the stem. Leaves spirally arranged with narrowly elliptic dark green lamina, 13–30 cm by 4.5–10 cm wide, simple, entire margin with a glabrous upper surface and slightly villose beneath (Plate 1). Inflorescence terminal ovoid to fusiform 4–10 cm by 2.5–4.5 cm across with numerous mucronate, bright red appendaged



Plate 1 Flowers, inflorescences and foliage

bracts each bearing 1–2 tubular flowers in their axils (Plate 1). Flowers with short calyx tube 13–17 mm, corolla yellow, densely pubescent with tubular labellum 26 by 24 mm.

Nutritive/Medicinal Properties

In ‘Suriname’s traditional medicine’, an extract of the stem is used against gonorrhoea, common cold and eye problems and as a laxative.

Other Uses

It is a common cultivated *Costus* species and a very popular ornamental and provides beautiful cut flower.

Comments

The plant is readily propagated from division of the rhizomes or from stem cuttings.

Selected References

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