



# tropical flowers



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## WHAT IS A TROPICAL FLOWER, AND WHAT IS NOT?

Tropical flowers, as their category name suggests, are native to the Torrid Zone (a.k.a. the tropics)—the section of the Earth between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

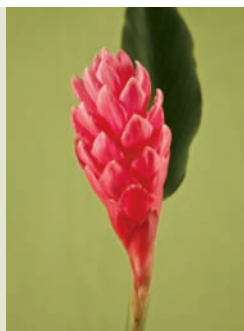
The regions immediately on the other sides of the tropics are known as the subtropics, and flowers that are native to those regions are known as subtropical flowers. They include *Strelitzia* (bird-of-paradise) and members of the *Proteaceae* family.

**Birds-of-paradise** *Strelitzia*, which is native to South Africa, is included in this article because it is widely considered a tropical flower and requires higher refrigeration temperatures than most other flowers that are native to subtropical and

temperate zones.

**Proteas** *Proteaceae* family members, however, including *Banksia*, *Leucadendron* (conebrush), *Leucospermum* (pincushion), *Protea* and *Teloepa* (waratah), which are native to South Africa and southern Australia, are not included because they have many of the same care requirements as nontropical flowers, such as refrigeration at 33 F to 36 F

**Note about orchids:** While most orchids are native to tropical regions (southern Asia, northern Australia, Central America, and northern and central South America), they are not included in this article because they were featured in our June issue (Pages 42-47) and will be showcased again in a 2010 issue.



*Alpinia purpurata*  
Red ginger

## ALPINIA spp.

Common names: red ginger, shell ginger

Vase life: 6 to 14 days or longer, depending on species, variety and postharvest care

Storage temperature: 55 F to 60 F

Availability: year-round

Origin: Malaysia; Indonesia; and Oceania (Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia)

**Special handling:** Submerging flower heads in room-temperature water for about 30 minutes upon these flowers' arrival, to help hydrate them, is often recommended; however, the practice has not been scientifically studied. *Alpinias* are geotropic (affected by gravity), so store them vertically to prevent blooms from curving.



*Anthurium andraeanum*  
Flamingo flower, Tailflower

## ANTHURIUM spp.

Common names: tailflower, flamingo flower

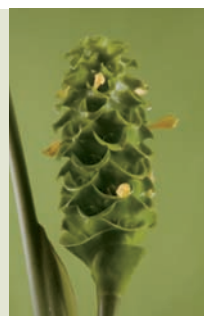
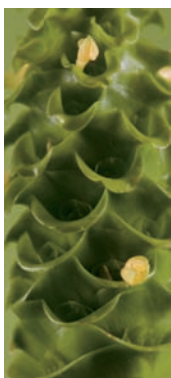
Vase life: 10 to 28 days or longer, depending on species, variety and postharvest care

Storage temperature: 55 F to 65 F; ideal storage temperatures vary among species and varieties

Availability: year-round

Origin: Central America and Colombia

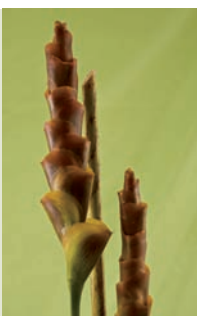
**Special handling:** Submerging flower heads in room-temperature water for two or more hours upon these flowers' arrival, to help hydrate them, is often recommended; however, it is not a scientifically proven practice.



*Calathea burle-marxii*  
'Green Ice'



*Calathea crotalifera*  
Rattlesnake Calathea



*Calathea lutea*  
Cigar Calathea, Cauassú

## CALATHEA spp.

Common names: 'Green Ice' *Calathea*, 'Blue Ice' *Calathea*, rattlesnake *Calathea*, cigar *Calathea*, cauassú

Vase life: 6 to 10 days or longer, depending on species and postharvest care

Storage temperature: 55 F to 60 F

Availability: year-round, depending on species and variety

Origin: tropical Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and the West Indies

### **COSTUS** spp.

**Common names:** spiral ginger, painted spiral ginger, spotted spiral ginger, spiral flag, red tower ginger

**Vase life:** 7 to 21 days or longer, depending on species

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** year-round, depending on species and postharvest care

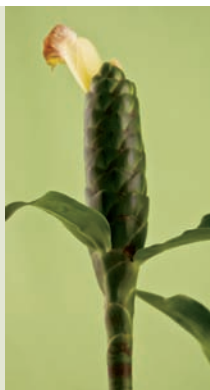
**Origin:** tropical Mexico; Central America; western South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru); Hispaniola (Haiti, Dominican Republic); tropical India; and Southeast Asia



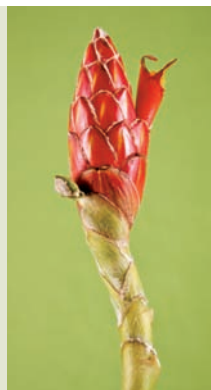
*Costus comosus*  
(syn. *C. barbatus*)  
Spiral ginger,  
Red tower ginger



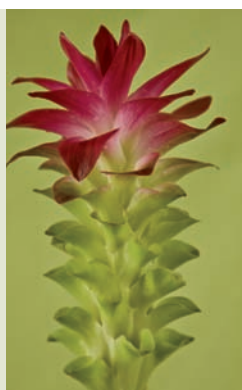
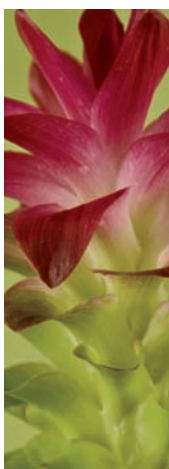
*Costus dubius*  
Spiral ginger



*Costus pictus*  
Spiral ginger,  
Painted spiral ginger,  
Spotted spiral ginger



*Costus pulverulentus*  
Spiral ginger



*Curcuma longa*  
(syn. *C. domestica*)  
Turmeric

### **CURCUMA** spp.

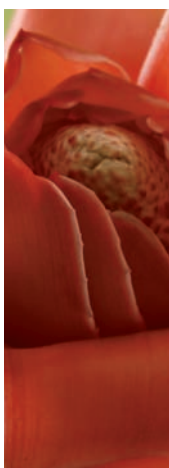
**Common name:** turmeric

**Vase life:** 7 to 10 days

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** April through December

**Origin:** tropical India, Southeast Asia and northern Australia



*Etlingera elatior*  
Torch ginger,  
Philippine waxflower

### **ETLINGERA** spp.

(syn. **NICOLAIA, PHAEOMERIA**)

**Common names:** torch ginger, Philippine waxflower

**Vase life:** 3 to 10 days, depending on species and postharvest care

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** year-round, depending on species and variety

**Origin:** Indonesia

## **vase-life extenders**

**PROCESSING** Immediately remove tropical flowers from their shipping boxes. Check the flower quality, and inspect for insects. If insects are present, spray the flowers with an insecticidal soap (e.g., Safer®, Garden Safe® or Ortho® EcoSense™)

With *Alpinias* (red ginger, shell ginger) and *Anthuriums*, submerge the flower heads in room-temperature water to help hydrate them (see “Special Handling” under “Alpinia” and “Anthurium,” opposite page).

Next recut the stem ends with a sharp knife, removing at least 1 inch of stem, then immediately place them into containers half filled with warm (100 F to 110 F) properly proportioned flower-food solution. Some tropical flowers respond favorably to the nutrients in flower-food solutions, but others are unaffected. However, other ingredients in flower foods help with water uptake (citric acid) and control bacteria in storage and arrangement containers (biocide), so it is recommended that you use flower foods with all tropical flowers.

Recut stems and change flower-food solution in storage containers every other day.

**REFRIGERATION** Tropical flowers are chill sensitive and will sustain damage when stored at temperatures lower than 50 F; therefore, experts advise storing most tropical flowers at 55 F to 60 F. One exception is long-term storage of birds-of-paradise (see “Storage temperature” under “Strelitzia,” Page 20).

If your department does not have a separate tropical flower cooler to accommodate the higher temperature requirements of these special blooms, store them outside the cooler, at room temperature. If you store tropical flowers outside of a floral cooler, mist them generously at least once a day.

**ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY** Most tropical flowers are fairly resistant to the effects of ethylene gas. One exception appears to be *Curcuma*, which is reported to be highly sensitive—although no scientific tests have been performed to substantiate that claim.

**CONSUMER ACTION** Instruct consumers to generously mist their tropical flowers at least once a day and to avoid exposing them to direct sunlight.

## HELICONIA spp.

**Common names:** lobster claw, false bird-of-paradise, wild plantain, balisier, firebird, macaw flower, parrot flower, parrot's plantain, parrot's beak, parakeet flower

**Vase life:** 7 to 14 days, depending on species.

Larger diameter and longer-stemmed species have longer vase life.

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** year-round

**Origin:** lowland regions of Central America and tropical South America; Melanesia (southwest Pacific islands)

**Special handling:** Do not submerge these flower heads in water as is recommended with *Alpinias* (gingers), *Anthuriums* and *Strelitzias*. To clean the flower heads, sponge with room-temperature soapy water, then rinse and let dry. Add shine to nonfuzzy varieties by spraying with an antitranspirant or plant shine product or by applying a light coat of cooking oil.



*Heliconia bihai*  
Firebird, Macaw flower, Wild plantain, False plantain, Balisier



*Heliconia caribaea*  
Wild plantain, Balisier



*Heliconia psittacorum*  
Parrot's plantain, Parrot's flower, Parrot flower, Parakeet flower, Parrot's beak



*Heliconia rostrata*  
Fishtail *Heliconia*, Hanging crab claws, Hanging lobster claw, Pendant *Heliconia*



*Musa uranoscopus*  
Flowering banana

## MUSA spp.

**Common name:** flowering banana

**Vase life:** 7 to 21 days or longer, depending on postharvest care

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 65 F

**Availability:** year-round

**Origin:** Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma)

## STRELITZIA spp.

**Common names:** bird-of-paradise, crane flower

**Vase life:** 7 to 14 days

**Storage temperature:** short-term storage (three or less days), 55 F; long-term storage (more than three days), 44 F to 46 F

**Availability:** year-round

**Origin:** subtropical South Africa

**Special handling:** To open tight birds-of-paradise, soak the flower heads in lukewarm water for about 20 minutes, then insert your thumb or forefinger inside the unopened sheath, through the slit on the upper side of the flower head, and gently lift out at least

*Strelitzia reginae*  
Bird-of-paradise, Crane flower

one of the new flowers (you can remove more flowers if you handle them extremely delicately). If you remove more than one flower, carefully spread them into a fan-shaped display, cautiously remove the thin white membrane that separates each and rinse off any nectar exudate.

## TAPEINOCHILOS spp.

**Common names:**

Indonesian

wax ginger,

Indonesian ginger,

pineapple ginger

**Vase life:** 6 to 14 days

**Storage temperature:**

55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** year-round

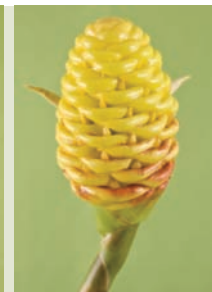
**Origin:** eastern Indonesia, New Guinea and northern Australia



*Tapeinochilos ananassae*  
Indonesian wax ginger, Indonesian ginger, Pineapple ginger



*Zingiber zerumbet*  
Shampoo ginger, Pine-cone ginger, Wild ginger



*Zingiber spectabile*  
Beehive ginger, Malaysian ginger

## ZINGIBER spp.

**Common names:** beehive ginger, Malaysian ginger, shampoo ginger, pine-cone ginger, wild ginger

**Vase life:** 6 to 14 days or longer, depending on species and postharvest care

**Storage temperature:** 55 F to 60 F

**Availability:** year-round, depending on species

**Origin:** tropical India and Southeast Asia

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Flower photos by Colin Gilliam

Taken from *Neotropica: Hawaii Tropical Flower & Plant Guide*, by Hitomi Gilliam, AIFD, and Lois Hiranaga, AIFD.

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