



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Costus igneus¹

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Introduction

The large, smooth, dark green leaves of this tropical evergreen have light purple undersides and are spirally arranged around stems, forming attractive, arching clumps arising from underground rootstocks (Fig. 1). Plants reach to about two feet tall, with the tallest stems falling over and lying on the ground. Beautiful, 1.5-inch diameter, orange flowers are produced in the warm months, appearing on cone-like heads at the tips of branches. They are especially showy and will stimulate compliments from visitors to your garden.

General Information

Scientific name: *Costus igneus*

Pronunciation: KOS-tus IG-nee-us

Common name(s): Spiral-Flag, Fiery Costus

Family: *Costaceae*

Plant type: perennial

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: specimen; container or above-ground planter; mass planting; cascading down a wall; accent

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

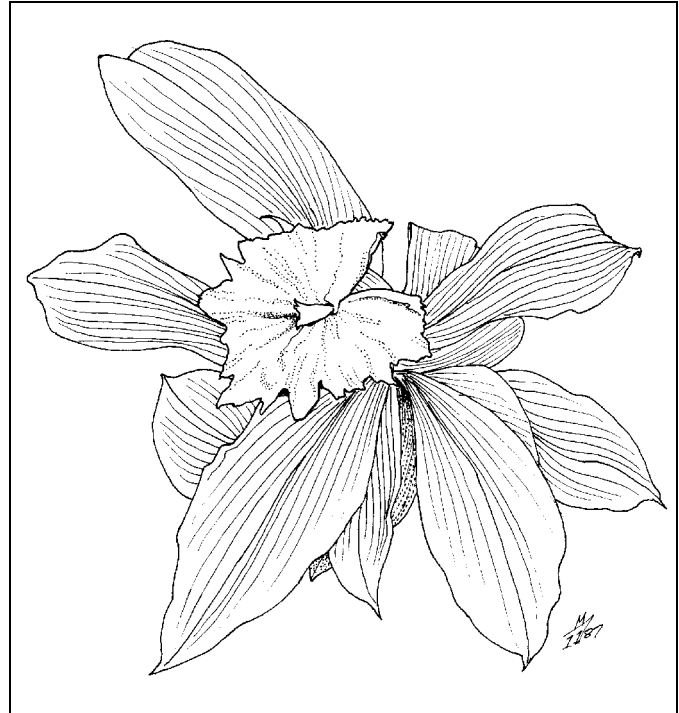


Figure 1. Spiral-Flag.

Plant habit: upright; spreading

Plant density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: oblong
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: orange
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: green
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Growing in either full sun or partial shade, Spiral Flag needs fertile soil and ample moisture, and is often planted near water. It makes a nice accent plant in a shrub border, where the orange flowers will contrast the greens of the shrub border. Planted on two to three foot centers, it acts as a tall ground cover and can brighten a partially shaded location.

Propagation is by division of the clumps, cuttings, or by separating the offsets or plantlets that form below the flower heads.

Mites and nematodes can be a problem, especially on light, sandy soil.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.