



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Alpinia zerumbet*¹

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Introduction

This lush, coarse-textured, clumping evergreen is planted for its heavy rosette of arching stems and green leaves arising from a large loose center (Fig. 1). Leaves are typically 12 to 15 inches long and four to five inches wide, arranged in two rows along each unbranched stem. Its attractive shell-like, white or pink fragrant flowers are borne in drooping clusters at the end of the stems. The upright spreading form makes it very suitable as an accent plant growing in a bed of ground cover or toward the front of a shrub border. A wonderful, dense foliage display is created when planted in mass on three to five-foot centers.

General Information

Scientific name: *Alpinia zerumbet*

Pronunciation: al-PIN-ee-uh zair-um-BET

Common name(s): Shellflower, Shell Ginger

Family: *Zingiberaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous

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; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; naturalizing; suitable for growing indoors; cut flowers; accent

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 1. Shellflower.

Height: 6 to 9 feet

Spread: 5 to 8 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Description

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-35, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1999. Please visit the EDIS web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf arrangement: spiral
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: fragrant
Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white
Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
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: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: sprouts from roots or lower trunk

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Shell Flower grows moderately fast in fertile, moist soil, doing best in wind-sheltered locations in partial shade to sun. Plants look good and flower with as little as two hours of direct sun. The long, graceful leaves give off a ginger aroma when crushed. Tolerance to wet soil makes it an excellent stream-side plant. But to look its best it should receive irrigation occasionally during dry weather. Freezing temperatures burn leaves. As winter nighttime temperatures dip into the mid 20's, stems are killed to the ground and they resprout slowly in the spring. Temperatures in the low 20's usually will kill the plant.

The clone 'Vittata' has yellow-splotched foliage and is now quite common.

Propagation is by division of the crowded clumps.

Mites can be a minor pest problem.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.

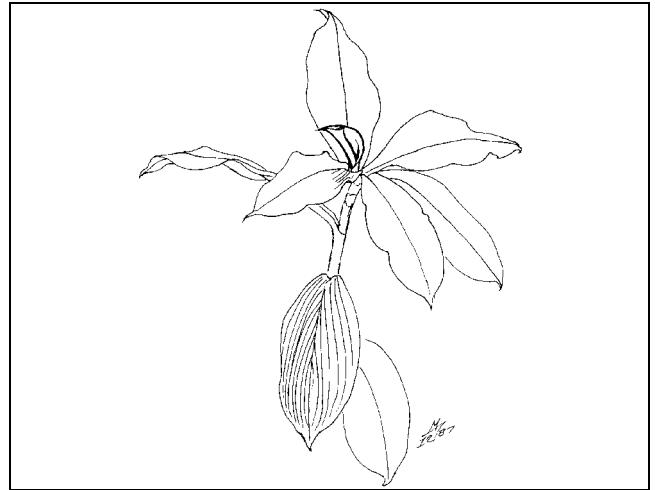


Figure 3. Foliage of Shellflower