Costus speciosus ‘Variegatus’
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Introduction

The large, soft, variegated leaves of this tropical evergreen are borne on red stems emerging directly from the ground (Fig. 1). Each leaf has a narrow white strip along each margin with occasional light streaks through the blade. They alternate in a spiralling fashion around the stem, forming attractive, arching clumps arising from underground rootstocks. Plants reach 6 to 8 feet tall, with the tallest stems occasionally falling over and lying on the ground. Beautiful, 1.5-inch diameter, white flowers are produced in the warm months, appearing on cone-like heads at the tips of branches.

General Information

Scientific name: Costus speciosus ‘Variegatus’
Pronunciation: KOS-tus spee-see-OH-sus
Common name(s): Variegated Crepe Ginger, Variegated Spiral-Flag
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: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 6 to 8 feet
Spread: 3 to 4 feet
Plant habit: upright; spreading
Plant density: open
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Figure 1. Variegated Crepe Ginger.
Costus speciosus 'Variegatus' -- Variegated Crepe Ginger

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** undulate  
**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)  
**Leaf venation:** parallel  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches  
**Leaf color:** variegated  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white  
**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:** reddish  
**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:** 36 to 60 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 sun or partial shade, Crepe Ginger needs fertile soil and ample moisture, and is often planted near water. Plants receiving regular fertilization often look the best. It makes a nice accent plant in a shrub border, where the variegated foliage will contrast the greens of the shrub border. Planted on 3- to 4-foot centers, it forms a loose, open mass of foliage, and can brighten a partially shaded location. Foliage can burn up in full day sun.

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

Pests and Diseases

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