



PLANT FACT SHEET

Curcuma longa L.

GENUS *Curcuma* FAMILY Zingiberaceae

COMMON NAMES Turmeric

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Rhizome, Root, leaves - condiment, Herb, Spice, Flowers

The orange coloured rhizome is used as seasoning especially in curry. They are also used for food colouring. They can be used fresh or boiled and dried.

The young shoots are also eaten.

The flowers are roasted or fried and eaten.

DESCRIPTION

A herb in the ginger family which continues growing from year to year. For harvesting it is grown as an annual crop. It grows up to 1 m high and spreads to 50 cm across. The stem is erect. Under the ground it has bright orange fattened stem or rhizome. These have a sweet smell. The main fattened part is about 5-8 cm long by 1-5 cm across. It has thinner branches off it. These are thickened with secondary tubers. The leaves are in a cluster and have leaf stalks that clasp the stem. The leaves are sword shaped and have long leaf stalks. Leaves are long, flat and bright green. The flowers are dull yellow. They occur in clusters of 3-5. Normally the cultivated turmeric is a sterile triploid plant which does not bear fruit.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant. It is widespread in coastal areas up to 1000 m altitude in the Philippines. It needs a hot moist climate and a well drained soil. The soil needs to be loose for good rhizomes. Plants can grow in the shade but the yield is lower. Plants are drought and frost tender. It needs a temperature above 13°C. It suits hardiness zones 10-11. In Sichuan and Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are normally grown from pieces of the rhizome. Pieces with one or two buds are used. Larger side tubers are best. They are planted 6-8 cm deep. The distance between plants needs to be 30-40 cm. They can also be grown from seed where these occur. The roots are harvested as the leaves start to die back.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Leaves appear above ground in about 4 weeks. The crop is harvested in about 9-10 months when the lower leaves turn yellow. When the roots are harvested they are put in boiling water for an hour. This assists drying and avoids sprouting. They are then dried in the sun. The outer layer is removed by rubbing.

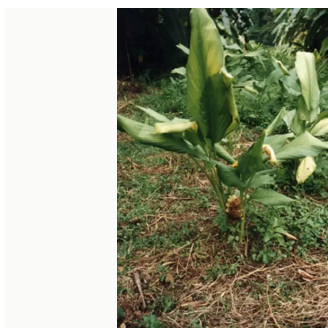
NOTES

As Linnaeus used the wrong plant and Koenig used the right one it is recommended that Valetton's name be used. There are about 50 *Curcuma* species. They are mostly in SE Asia. It possibly has anti-cancer properties.

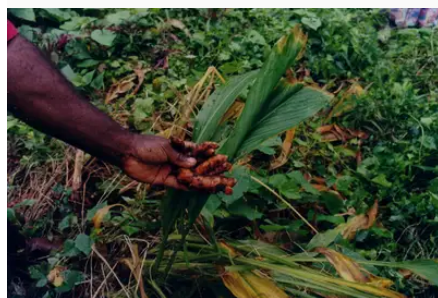
PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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