

December 2025

Plant of the month

Red Tower Ginger



Common Name: Red Tower Ginger
Scientific Name: *Costus comosus* var. *bakeri* (K.Schum.) Maas
Family: Costaceae
Genus: *Costus* – latin for an aromatic root used in ancient Rome.
Species epithet: *comosus* - bearing hairs on leaves.



Costus is the largest and most diverse genus in the family which comprises over 80 species, including one in Australia, *Costus dubius*. The large red terminal bracts of Red Tower Ginger attract birds seeking nectar from the tubular yellow flowers. The flower's small opening allows only very small birds with long beaks to access the nectar. In the Americas, where this plant grows naturally, these birds are often hummingbirds. These birds don't occur in our garden, but you may see Noisy or Indian Miners visiting the flowers in search of nectar, pulling the flowers of the plant and accessing the nectar from the back of flowers

Costus comosus var. *bakeri* is a hardy perennial for sub-tropical and sheltered warm temperate gardens, where it performs best with morning sun, well composted soil and regular watering. Remove canes to ground level after flowering. Flowering stems last months in the garden and weeks if cut and placed in a large vase. Gently feel the under surface of the leaves for another pleasantly surprising feature of this rewarding plant. Plants can be purchased from our Growing Friends Plant Sales open Mon-Fri 11am-2pm and Sat-Sun 11am-2pm.



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Distribution

Southern Mexico to Ecuador including Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama and Colombia.

Native Habitat

Wooded slopes between 600 and 1300 metres often on soils of volcanic origin.

Description

A large clump forming perennial that produces long canes up to 2 m tall from an underground rhizome. New canes have a spiralling habit and leaves are spirally arranged along the stem. Leaves are large, mid-green and have downy hairs on the under surface that are soft to touch.

Flowers

Bright yellow tubular flowers emerge from large showy terminal clusters of red bracts with leaf like appendages.

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