

Did You Know?



Turmeric, *Curcuma longa*

- Turmeric is a tropical plant resembling ginger, growing about 3 feet tall from a rhizome, with pale yellow flowers.
- It is in the Zingiberaceae family which includes cardamom, galangal, and ginger.
- Turmeric is hardy in zones 8-11 and prefers heat, humidity and partial to full shade to thrive in either the garden or a container.
- While the flowers are edible and the leaves are used as a food wrap, the part of the turmeric plant is most known for is the rhizome. The rhizomes are harvested in the fall after the plant goes dormant. Rhizomes can be saved for growing the following year, or boiled, dried and ground to use as a spice.
- Fresh turmeric is prepared by grating or pressing. The whole rhizome can also be washed, peeled and frozen.
- Turmeric is known for its use in Indian cooking since it is a primary ingredient in curry powder. As a food dye, turmeric adds a yellow hue to foods like butter, cheese, pickles and yellow mustard, ice cream, cereals, orange juice, cake frostings, chips and sauces.
- Native to India, there is evidence of turmeric on pottery dating back to 2500 BCE. The plant spread through the Mediterranean and Middle East by 330 BCE and then onward to China, followed by East then West Africa and Jamaica in the 1700s.
- Many health benefits have historically been attributed to the constituents that make up turmeric, from ancient Indian and Chinese healers to modern day Western medicine. However, too much turmeric can interfere with some medications and have other side effects.
- Curcumin, the naturally occurring polyphenol, has both an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Research is ongoing and is showing benefits of turmeric for inflammation, degenerative eye conditions, metabolic syndrome, arthritis, hyperlipidemia, anxiety, muscle soreness after exercise and kidney health.
- Historically, turmeric was used to dye the saffron robes of Buddhist monks more economically than saffron. It is also used in the cosmetic industry.
- The curcumin in turmeric is very sensitive to pH which causes a bright yellow dye in acid mixtures and orange-red in alkaline mixtures.

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