

Growing Ginger in the Northeast

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We have been growing ginger in the Hudson Valley for four seasons (since 2012). This past season, we grew turmeric as well. This presentation will cover how we start and manage our crop of ginger from start to finish, a time frame covering roughly 8 months.

We purchase our ginger from Hawaii Clean Seed (also known as Biker Dude Puna Organics). This past season we purchased 60# of seed and harvested roughly 350# of “number one ginger”. We retail at \$20.00/lb and wholesale at about \$12-\$14/lb, which I believe is in the middle of what pricing can be on this crop. We start our ginger in the beginning of March, in 1020 trays of potting soil. We use Vermont compost, Forte V. The ginger is in those trays for approximately 2.5 months before being transplanted out. We can fit about 20-25 pieces in a tray, laying them flat but not touching. We cover with soil lightly.

When we have trayed up all our ginger rhizomes, we put them in a heated germination chamber set to approximately 80 degrees. We convert a small cooler (5' by 12') to the Ginger Sauna. Our electric is solar powered which keeps the price down. We water every 2-3 days in the beginning; just enough to not let things get completely dried out. Ginger does not like to be heavily watered when in trays. It doesn't need light to sprout. It is a rhizome so has most everything it needs to get started in life. Sprouting happens over a period of 2.5 months. We shoot to move the trays into our high tunnels around the 3rd week in May, after the chance of cold weather is largely past.

At the time of the transition to the high tunnel, the ginger has sprouted and needs to get the sunlight it was missing in the dark, heated chamber. Once in the tunnel, the ginger will begin to harden off in the trays. This year, we learned that turmeric is much slower than ginger and is only beginning to sprout. We moved it along into the high tunnels to pace it with the ginger. After a couple of weeks we are ready to plant the ginger into the soil. We use 30" wide raised beds and plant in a single row at 6" spacing. We dig a channel down the middle of the bed with a pickaxe, which naturally forms a bit of a hill on either side of the planting area. We then tease the young ginger plants apart since their roots are somewhat tangled with each other and plant them out. After getting them all set up in the channel we apply some Vermont Compost Plus on top of the ginger rhizome before covering with soil. Ginger is a heavy feeder and likes a lot of organic matter. Our tunnels are between 8-10% organic matter. We then cover and slightly hill the plant at the time of placing the rhizome in the soil.

We generally don't hill again. (You certainly could.) Throughout the season we make sure the ginger gets regular watering, similar to our tomatoes since they are on the same irrigation set up. We give the ginger a sprinkling of Neptune's Fish Emulsion mixture, 2-3 times during the growing season for a little boost.

We start to harvest for Labor Day Market and continue to harvest for market and wholesale until mid-October. The ginger really starts to size up in the month of September and by the beginning

of October the hands of ginger are quite large. When you start to see the flower buds being produced on the plant it is a nice indication that the ginger root is now starting to gain some weight. There is a good bit of difference in size between the ginger that we harvest in the beginning of September and the ginger we harvest in mid October. It is a little nerve wracking for a farmer who uses the same tunnels for winter growing. Getting the timing of all of your plants coming and going can be quite challenging.

We have developed other added-value products from our ginger, which are nice additions to the ginger line up. We turn our #2 ginger into Ground ginger by slicing it, dehydrating it and then grinding it in a Vitamix blender. We package it in .75 oz jars and sell it for \$4.00/jar. We also do a Ginger-Lemon Curd, which is canned, and are in the process of developing ginger, ginger-rhubarb and ginger apple syrups. There are many possibilities with this crop.

Turmeric is widely known for its anti-inflammatory attributes. Turmeric takes a little longer to get going and definitely benefits from the extra growing time in September and October. It is possible to get some very large hands of turmeric as well. Different varieties grow at different rates. We have found the yellow to be the most aggressive and the strongest in flavor. Ginger-turmeric elixirs have become a favorite fall drink.

All parts of the ginger and turmeric plant can be used, both leaves and root. Leaves make a nice tea, using them either fresh or dried. Turmeric leaves are very large and can be used to wrap fish for baking or grilling and thus infusing the flavor in a subtle way.

Harvesting a sizable crop of these tropical plants in the Northeast is quite exciting. Both ginger and turmeric can add some real exotic appeal to your market offerings in early fall.