



Promoting sustainable agriculture
since 1974

What's Galangal Got to Do With It?

Galangal looks like ginger, with its knobs and bumps, but has a very different aroma and taste. People who are unfamiliar with the look of the raw rhizome are most likely to have encountered a few galangal slices if they have ever enjoyed the delicious Thai soup *tom kha*, made with coconut milk, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves and *nam pa* or *nam pla* (fish sauce). Galangal is the ingredient that adds a spicy, peppery perfume to this complex, creamy-tangy-savory-sweet soup.

PRODUCE NOTES

March 12, 2008

Roots to the Past: Ginger, Galangal, and Turmeric

Because of its shape, the knobby, bumpy ginger “root” we are accustomed to buying is called a “hand”. This hand of ginger is not really a root; it’s the stem—called a rhizome—of the ginger plant. Found growing at, or just below soil level, rhizomes simultaneously send out roots and shoots from their nodes, which makes the ginger plant extremely hardy and fast-spreading; if the root system is cut, the root does not die, but instead becomes several plants.

Although ginger has been used for medicinal and culinary applications in Asian countries for thousands of years, it found unlikely aficionados in Europe. Romans greatly valued ginger for its medicinal properties, but after the fall of the Roman Empire, ginger almost disappeared from Europe. Then a Venetian trader named Marco Polo brought ginger back to Europe from his travels to South East Asia, reinvigorating Europe’s love affair with ginger.

Fresh ginger’s flavor is pungent and spicy. (Young ginger, usually available around the beginning of spring, generally has thinner skin, more tender flesh, and brighter flavor than mature ginger.) Galangal and turmeric, who are close relatives of ginger, espouse their own unique flavors: galangal tends to be more tangy, astringent and aromatic than ginger, and generally has denser, slightly drier flesh than ginger, with a woodier, knobbier appearance.

Turmeric, an intensely yellow-orange colored root, is used extensively in Indian and South Asian food and rituals. Used fresh, turmeric’s flavor is delicate and fragrant, and not as pungent as ginger’s. Once cut, turmeric imparts a deep orange color to anything it touches, which accounts for dried turmeric’s popularity as a food colorant and cosmetic. Revered by various religions in India, many believe that dried turmeric represents auspicious elements of purity, prosperity, and fertility during wedding ceremonies. Brides’ arms or hands may be covered in dried turmeric, and in some ceremonies a mixture of rice and turmeric is poured over both brides’ and grooms’ heads.

All three roots can be used fresh or dried in cooking. To obtain ginger juice, cut about a one to two inch piece and scrape the skin off using the edge of a teaspoon, then grate the flesh on a fine grater. Squeeze the juice into a bowl using your hand, or place the pulp inside some cheesecloth and twist the cloth to extract the juice.



- Denise McAllan, Purchasing

Zinziber officinale

Where the Ginger Grows: Ferris Family Farm

In 1977, a young man named **Ben Ferris** bought seven and a half acres of land on the island of Kaua'i, Hawai'i, and he began growing papayas in 1980. He had 1,500 established papaya trees when, in November of 1982, there came a wild hurricane with winds up to 120 mph, sinking boats, destroying entire beachfront hotels, devastating 2,300 buildings and leaving more than 500 people homeless. "The papaya trees went down like dominoes," Ben Ferris says, remembering Hurricane Iwa. Ben replanted, and eventually recovered from Hurricane Iwa, but in 1992 another devastating hurricane (named Iniki) wiped out his papaya prospects yet again. Ben left farming for six years, working with ceramic tile for three and driving heavy equipment for another three. In the mid 1990's he planted ginger, for while papayas have to be treated before they can be shipped out of Hawai'i, and sweet potatoes are susceptible to fruit flies, ginger is relatively hardy and easy to ship. For these reasons, other nearby farmers were having success with ginger, and Ben decided to try his hand at ginger farming as well.

He started with just 30 pounds of ginger, which isn't much, but ginger reproduces itself phenomenally quickly, and in two years, 30 pounds of ginger had turned into 600 pounds! Today, Ben's current yield is anywhere from 40,000 to 60,000 lbs per year. In addition to yellow and white gingers, the farm also produces galangal and turmeric, all certified organic by HOFA (Hawai'i Organic Farmers Association).

Several members of the Ferris family are involved with the farm; Ben's wife Colette does all the bookkeeping, their 15-year-old son helps with the harvest, and a college-aged son helps during the summers (he uses his pay for his college education). Ben's 80-year-old mother is also involved! The family plans to begin producing organic chocolate soon, and Ben's mother is spearheading the family's chocolate project; researching chocolate, planting seeds and caring for the seedlings.

It's always interesting to find out a farmer's favorite ways to use the produce that they grow. The Ferris family uses ginger to relieve the symptoms of flu and colds. Ben explains: grate the ginger and pour hot (but not boiling) water over it. (There are healthful enzymes in ginger which can be destroyed by boiling temperatures.) Let the mixture steep, then add lemon and honey, and sip this concoction for relief. Ben Ferris also suggests juicing both ginger and tumeric for colds and flu.

Ben Ferris' farm operates under the names Ferris Family Farm and Kolo Kai Organic Farm. I asked him to explain the name Kolo Kai, and he did: on Kaua'i, there is a main road which goes all the way around the island. From anyplace on the road, there's an inland (or mountain) side, and there's the ocean side; when giving directions, residents refer to the *makai* side, or ocean side, or the *mauka* side, or mountain side. *Kolo* is the name of their road, and they are on the *makai* side; this is why the farm is named Kolo Kai!

In addition to the white and yellow ginger, galangal and turmeric which he sells to Veritable Vegetable (we are the largest outlet for this small-scale farmer), Ben Ferris also grows avocados, papayas, limes, eggfruit and occasionally vegetables and herbs. You can find him selling his produce directly to the public at his local Sunshine (farmers') Markets on Kaua'i twice a week.

- Dani Yamamoto

Visit the farm's webstore to learn more: stores.ferrisfamilyfarms.com/StoreFront.bok

