

As Jim is passionate about passiflora, so I am passionate about the hedychium family of gingers, also known as butterfly ginger.

Butterfly gingers grow from rhizomes - thick root systems planted just below the surface of earth. The rhizomes send up leafy shoots above the ground, while spreading prolifically across the bed. Hedychium have symmetrical sets of leaves on a thick stalk, growing straight up for an average of 3 – 5 feet, ending in a flower spike. In this way they are similar to most varieties of lily, hence they are often called ginger lilies. Hedychium have a poor reputation in Central America since they have been known to clog the streams of rainforests, like water hyacinths can here, so they are treated as weeds.



The most common hedychium is the white butterfly ginger (*hedychium coronarium*). This is a small variety, growing in full clusters about 3 feet tall. The bud appears on the top of each stalk, shaped like a pinecone, which sends out stark white butterfly shaped flowers. Usually 2-6 flowers appear from the cone at a time, which lasts for a day or two. The flowers continue to appear for several weeks from the same cones. White butterfly ginger is highly perfumed, giving off a sweet smell reminiscent of gardenias.

*Hedychium flavum* is a yellow variation of the white butterfly, which grows on taller, much thicker stalks. It can reach heights of 5 feet, with flower stalks of up to a foot long. The individual flowers are 3"- 4" in diameter. The flower stalk looks a little different from the white version since it opens into a spiked cone.



Kahili gingers are so named because they tend to bloom all at once, in a cluster reminiscent of the feathered Kahili standards used in tribal celebrations in Hawaii and Polynesia. The flowers are smaller, only 1" – 2" in diameter, and produce more blooms at one time in a tight cluster. Kahili gingers tend to be less fragrant than the white butterfly, but continue to send out fresh blossoms every other day to replace wilting ones. The flower stalk continues to bloom for about 2 weeks. These varieties have

been hybridized to get greater variety of color and fragrance, as well as more hardy plants. The color range is from yellow, to orange, pink and now red, with such exotic names as *hedychium Elizabeth* and *hedychium Kahili Ann*.



Gingers like wet feet and full sun. They are fast growers, and the stalks die once they have bloomed. I cut mine back at the end of November, and they start sending up fresh shoots in January. Gingers will not bloom from last year's foliage, so it is necessary to cut back any that have not bloomed once the blooming has ceased. They are hardy throughout the US, and have been known to grow throughout the Pacific NW, since they are dormant through the winter.