

## How to Grow Turmeric



I'm not sure why turmeric isn't more popular, considering that growing your own, Thai food and DIY projects are all the rage. *Curcuma longa* is a tropical rhizome with an intriguing past that **looks just as great in the garden as it tastes on the table**. The whole plant is edible; the roots are boiled, dried and ground up to produce turmeric powder, the leaves make a wrap for steamed fish, and even the flowers **can be eaten as an exotically beautiful vegetable, like lettuce with a kick**. Oh, and did I mention that impersonating turmeric is a crime in India?

## Why You Should Grow Turmeric



First of all, its large ribbed leaves create a lush and tropical look in any garden, and it's easily dug up and overwintered in northern climates. It has been the toughest and most reliable plant in my garden, with one rhizome increasing to hundreds more over the course of a few years with no effort on my part. The large green and white inflorescences nestled between the leaves are beautiful both as cut flowers or enjoyed in the garden. Besides its appeal as a garden plant, *Curcuma longa* is also **incredibly useful in the home and kitchen**.

This might be one of the world's healthiest foods; so healthy in fact that I wouldn't hesitate to call it a miracle drug. Not only does it **contain a healthy serving of iron and manganese**, It has proven itself as a **cancer treatment**, both preventing and destroying cancerous cells. Curcumin, turmeric's active ingredient, actually **lowers cholesterol** by working in tandem with the liver to remove harmful cholesterol from the body.

Turmeric's **antiseptic and antibacterial properties** make it useful for **cleaning and treating wounds**, and its **anti-inflammatory properties allow it to treat arthritis, psoriasis, headaches and even blood clots**! Think of it as Motrin, but with none of the harmful side effects. None of these health benefits are new to South Asians, who've been cultivating the plant and using it for over five thousand years for both treating ailments and treating themselves to some delicious curries.



Despite its status as one of the world's healthiest foods, turmeric is probably most widely used as **a dye**. You see turmeric every day as a food dye **in mustard, margarine, chicken soup or just about anywhere else a golden colour is called for**. I've even used some small rhizomes as a sort of sidewalk crayon or chalk!

The fact that turmeric is both yellow and a spice has given it the unfortunate nickname of "Indian Saffron" for its use as a substitute or knockoff of the much costlier spice, saffron. This isn't to say that saffron is better than turmeric; it's just different! Turmeric has its own unique flavour; warm, peppery and earthy, tasting nothing like saffron. Saffron is harvested from the stigmas of Crocus sativus and has been used for thousands of years (almost as long as turmeric) in Europe and central Asia, but is now mostly used for Spanish dishes like yellow rice.

Even so, the yellow rice mixes sold at the grocery store are made with lots of turmeric and barely any saffron at all. Even Mahatma 'Saffron Yellow Rice' lists turmeric as one of the top ingredients in the saffron flavouring, with real saffron followed only by the silicone dioxide used to prevent caking. It's amazing that passing off turmeric as saffron is done with such ease nowadays, especially considering that in the medieval days of Germany offenders were executed; burnt alive or buried along with their illegitimate spices under the safranschou code. An article in the Times of India *looks* like the coverage of a drug bust until you realize that the contraband is in fact rice husks and bad turmeric, not meth and coke.



*Curcuma longa*'s leaves, close up

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Growing this miracle drug couldn't be easier, and anyone can grow their own provided it receives enough moisture. *Curcuma longa* is naturally deciduous from fall until late spring, which makes digging and overwintering abundantly easy.



Turmeric in the garden

### **Moisture, Sun and Soil**

Turmeric will handle anything you throw at it, returning from drought and sailing through floods. Mine grows in the dry shade under the house's eaves as well as constantly soggy soil. Garden literature will tell you that it requires moist and well-drained soil, but it thrives in the clay and muck of my back yard like a weed. Turmeric can grow in full sun, but only if the soil remains constantly wet. Otherwise, provide mid-day shade. If the plant is stressed by drought or too much sun, the leaves will hang limp and develop burnt tips.



Turmeric is to the left and middle, along with some other rhizomes.

### ***Processing***

I haven't found a universally accepted method for making turmeric powder, but the general consensus seems to be as follows:

1. Clean the rhizomes thoroughly
2. Boil rhizomes for 45 min.
3. Peel off the skins
4. Dry in shade for at least a week
5. Break up rhizomes with a hammer
6. Grind rhizomes using a mortar and pestle, or a food processor

Again, I haven't done this myself yet but I plan on trying it myself soon. If you happen to have a recipe, please share!

Source: <http://www.therainforestgarden.com/2011/12/how-to-grow-turmeric.html>