



Cultural Requirements for Turmeric (Olena)

Originally a native of India, turmeric (*Curcuma domestica*) the Polynesian introduced plant known in Hawai'i as 'Olena is now widely cultivated throughout the tropical Asia and in smaller extent in other subtropical and tropical parts of the world. Turmeric is also known as Curcumin, Indian Saffron, Yu Jin, along with several other names and has been dubbed a superfood.



This herbaceous plant with dark green leaves up to 4 feet in length grow from the rhizomes in a way similar to ginger and produces an upright inflorescence that resembles a single large white or sometimes purplish-white highly fragrant flower. Besides its use as a spice these dark yellow to orange fleshed rhizomes are packed with numerous medicinal benefits. Probably the most powerful natural anti-inflammatory and antioxidant, turmeric was culturally used to treat ear and respiratory infections. Recent studies have shown that turmeric aids in controlling diabetes and helps in the prevention of Alzheimer's and Cancer. It's also been proven to lower cholesterol and help relieve arthritis. Turmeric is used in skin treatments, from healing wounds to controlling psoriasis flares, as well as the treatment of gastrointestinal ailments and so much more!

Turmeric is deciduous, meaning that it loses its leaves, or "dies back" for a few months every year during its dormant season. During its growing season, spring, shoots emerge when the weather gets warmer.

Culture: Turmeric requires a warm and humid climate to thrive and in Hawai'i is usually found in mesic valleys in areas that were once inhabited by early Hawaiians. Turmeric will grow in temperatures between 68-95F. Turmeric does best in partially shaded areas avoiding all day long intense direct sunlight. For optimum growth keep in a light and loamy slightly acidic to slightly alkaline soil rich in organic matter with good drainage. Turmeric must be sheltered from the wind.

Watering: Keep the soil moist throughout the growing season but do not let it sit in water.

Fertilizing: Over fertilizing will burn your plants and too much nitrogen will produce more leaves instead of meatier rhizomes so it is suggested that turmeric be fertilized every month with an all-purpose liquid fertilizer during the growing season. Application of manure or compost is suggested and mulching works great.

Additional Care: The turmeric plant should not be pruned but the removal of dried leaves from time to time is sufficient. Turmeric is not prone to any serious disease or pests, but red spider mites and scales can become a problem. Rhizome rot and leaf spot appear when the plant is grown in waterlogged soil. Therefore, as mentioned above it is important to grow in well-drained soil.

Harvest: Turmeric takes 8-10 months to mature. Harvesting is done once the leaves become yellow and stems start to dry. Simply dig up the plant entirely. Cut the required amount and then replant the remaining part again to get a new plant growing.

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