Common Name: Red Tower Ginger
Scientific Name: Costus comosus var. bakeri (K.Schum.) Maas
Family: Costaceae
Etymology
Genus: Costus – spiral-flag, latin for imported aromatic root
Species: comosus - bearing hairs on leaves

Distribution
Southern Mexico to Ecuador including Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama and Colombia.

Native Habitat
Wooded slopes between 600 and 1300 meters often on soils of volcanic origin.

Description
A large clump forming perennial that produces long canes up to 2 m tall from an underground rhizome. New canes have a spiralling habit and leaves are spirally arranged along the stem. Leaves are large, mid-green and have downy hairs on the under surface that are soft to touch.

Flowers
Bright yellow tubular flowers emerge from large showy terminal clusters of red bracts with leave like appendages.

Location in Garden
Various locations including: Next to Visitor Centre, Spring Walk (bed 30,31), Tropical Garden.
To find additional locations and other plants in our garden, use our new Garden Explorer plant finder at: https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/Visit/Garden-Explorer

Information
This variety is often misnamed in horticulture as Costus barbatus, a critically endangered species from Costa Rica which does not have the leave-like appendages on the red floral bracts and has hairy (pubescent flowers) and longer ligules.

Costus is the largest and most diverse member of the Costaceae family comprising over 80 species, including one in Australia Costus dubius. The large red terminal bracts of Costus comosus var. bakeri attract birds who see clearly in the red colour spectrum and the nectar rich tubular flowers with a small opening allow for very small birds with long beaks to access the nectar. In the Americas these birds are often hummingbirds such as the Magnificent Hummingbird (Eugenes fulgens) pictured. These species don’t occur in our garden but you may see Noisy or Indian Miner birds visiting the flowers of Red Tower Ginger in search of nectar.

Costus comosus var. bakeri is a hardy perennial for sub-tropical and sheltered warm temperate gardens, where it performs best with morning sun, well composted soil and regular watering. Remove canes to ground level after flowering.