

March  
2019

# Plant of the Month

**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 leaf 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 leaf-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.



    
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