

Alpinia galanga

[Synonyms : *Alpinia zingiberina*, *Amomum galanga*, *Amomum medium*, *Languas galanga*, *Maranta galanga*]

GREATER GALANGAL is a perennial. Native to south-eastern Asia (including tropical China, Indonesia particularly the island of Java, Malaysia, and Iran) it has small orchid-like greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Aflidžan* (Bosnian, Serbian), *Alpínia galangová* (Slovakian), *Alpínia liečivá* (Slovakian), *Al'piniia galanga* (Russian), *Aratta* (Malayalam), *Arattai* (Tamil), *Baripankijar* (Marathi), *Calanga* (Spanish), *Catarrh root*, *Dumparasme* (Kannada), *False galangal*, *Galang*, *Galanga* (Bosnian, English, Serbian), *Galanga de l'Inde* (French), *Galangajuuri* (Finnish), *Galangal*, *Galanga maggiore* (Italian), *Galanga major*, *Galangarot* (Swedish), *Galangayökér* (Hungarian), *Galango* (Esperanto), *Galgan* (Bosnian, Serbian), *Galgán lekársky* (Slovakian), *Galgán obecný* (Czech), *Galgán veliký* (Czech), *Galgán větší* (Czech), *Galgant* (Bosnian, German, Serbian), *Galigaan* (Dutch), *Garengal* (Spanish), *Gengibre do Laos* (Portuguese), *Gengibre tailandés* (Portuguese), *Grand galanga* (French), *Greater galanga*, *Grosser Galgant* (German), *Grote galanga* (Dutch), *Java galangal*, *Kalgan* (Bosnian, Serbian), *Kathi* (Sindhi), *Kha* (Thai), *Kha ta deng* (Laotian), *Kolinjan* (Gujarati), *Kudanjan* (Urdu), *Kulanja* (Sanskrit), *Kulanjan* (Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi), *Kulinjan* (Bengali, Hindi), *Laja* (Sundanese), *Langkuweh* (Malaysian, Sumatran), *Languas*, *Langwas*, *Laos root*, *Large galangal*, *Lawas* (Malaysian, Sumatran), *Lengkuas* (Indonesian, Malaysian), *Lengkuas benar* (Malaysian), *Lengkuwas* (Javanese), *Lengoewas* (Dutch), *Major galangal*, *Mengkanang* (Malaysian), *Peddadumparashtram* (Telugu), *Pera-rattai* (Tamil), *Puar* (Malaysian), *Rasmi* (Kannada), *Riềng ám* (Vietnamese), *Riềng nép* (Vietnamese), *Romdeng* (Khmer), *Siamese ginger*, *Siamesische Ingwerlilie* (German), *Siam-Ingwer* (German), *Spice ginger*, *Stor galanga* (Danish), *Sundska galanga* (Bosnian, Serbian), *Sungandam tittiram* (Tamil), *Suur kalganirohi* (Estonian), and *Xuz rishe* (Russian).

The flowers are short-lived.

An essence known as *Essence d'amali* is extracted from the underground stem.

Greater galangal is much larger than galangal (*Alpinia officinarum*).

Galanga is, for some authorities, a corruption of Arabic *khulendjan* or *khalangian*, which may itself be derived from Chinese *liang-kiang* (mild ginger).

The celebrated Greek philosopher, historian and biographer, Plutarch (c. 46-c. 120) wrote of greater galangal's use by the ancient Egyptians as a fumigant. Then in about 600 greater galangal's medicinal virtues are lauded in a Sanskrit work (known as the *Susruta Samhita*) from the Benares area of India. In the 12th Century the Egyptians must still have been using the root as a fumigant as the Arabic geographer, Edrisi (c. 1100-1164) mentioned that it was being imported through Aden (an Egyptian port of entry for Asian goods). Then in the following Century Marco Polo (1254-1324) records that it was being produced in the Hanoi area of Vietnam. Apparently Europeans (who were destined to appreciate greater galangal's origins fully only in the mid-19th Century) were actually introduced to it in the Middle Ages according to references in various writings – and they viewed it as a medicinal drug.

In its natural habitat in south-eastern Asia however it has long been valued not only for its medicinal qualities but also as a spice – although of lesser standing than its close relative galangal.

In Java (now an Indonesian island) the raw flowers are eaten and are also pickled or used as an accompaniment for other vegetables. In India the seeds provide a spice and the root has been taken as an aphrodisiac.

Today greater galangal is used commercially, although to a lesser extent than galangal (*Alpinia officinarum*), as a flavouring by both the food and drinks industries, and for its scent in perfumes and toiletries

Medicinally, the roots have been used in India to treat stomach upsets, fever, catarrh and rheumatism.