

# *Hedychium spicatum*



**Family:** Zingiberaceae

**Local/common names:**  
Van-Haldi, Sati, Kapoor  
kachri, Karchura (Sanskrit)

**Trade name:** Kapoor  
kachri

**Profile:**

*Hedychium spicatum* belongs to the same family as ginger and turmeric and has been extensively used in traditional medicine systems for the treatment of diseases ranging from asthma to indigestion. The entire genus is native to the tropical belt in Asia and the Himalayas. Across its range (from Nepal to the Kumaon hills), *Hedychium spicatum* differs across its range with variations found in the colour of the flowers from white to pale yellow. Although the species is fairly commonly found, it is now being collected for its fragrant roots and seeds from the wild, putting pressure on the wild populations.

**Habitat and ecology:** This plant grows in moist soil and shaded areas in mixed forests. It occurs as a perennial herb in the Himalayas at an altitude of 800-3000 m. It is found in parts of the Western Himalayas, Nepal, Kumaon, Dehradun, Tehri and Terai regions of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

**Morphology:** *Hedychium spicatum* is a perennial rhizomatous herb measuring up to 1 m in height. The leaves are oblong and up to 30 cm long and 4-12 cm broad. The rhizome is quite thick, up to 7.5 cm in diameter, aromatic, knotty, spreading horizontally under the soil surface, grayish brown in colour with long, thick fibrous roots. The leaves are 30 cm or more in length while the inflorescence is spiked. The flowers are fragrant, white with an orange-red base and born in a dense terminal spike 15-25 cm on a robust leafy stem of 90-150 cm. The floral bracts are large green, one-flowered and the calyx is papery, 3-lobed and shorter than the bracts. The corolla tube is much longer than the calyx, and the filament of the stamen is red. The capsule is globular, 3-valved with an orange-red lining and the seeds are black with a red aril.

**Life cycle:** Shoot expansion of the plant takes place in the months of June-July, the plant is in flowering stage in August-September and fruiting takes place in October. The plant reaches senescence in December.

**Uses:** The fruit of the plant is cooked and eaten in savoury dishes with lentils. It is used in the treatment of indigestion and poor circulation due to thickening of the blood. The roots are considered useful in stomach ache, carminative, stimulant and for the treatment of liver problems, diarrhoea, food poisoning, inflammation, asthma, pains, bronchitis, brain tonic and snakebite. The rootstock yields 4% essential oil, which has a scent like that of hyacinths. The dried root is burnt as incense. This species is used in Ayurvedic and Yunani medicine as an aromatic oil. In Unani medicine, it is regarded as an aphrodisiac and used in the preparation of Sudarshan-Churna and Chandraprabhavati. The rhizomes are also used in the preparation of cosmetics, in perfume and soap industry, in the manufacture of incense and scented powder. The powdered rhizome can be used to perfume tobacco and as a deodorant. It is used in the preparation of 'Abir', a fragrant coloured powder used during the Holi festival and in religious ceremonies. The leaves are used for preparation of mats, fruits to soften meat and hard seeds, pulses while cooking. The species can be used as an ornamental plant. The rhizome is also used to make tea.

**Market rate:** The rhizomes are sold at Rs.15-60/- per kg dry weight.