



Heliconia 'Mexican Gold' and its Hybrids

By Emilia (Sherry) Ballester, HSPR Member

'Mexican Gold': A Well Known Heliconia Without An Official ID!

'Mexican Gold' is a beautiful golden yellow heliconia that well known heliconia collector and past President of HSPR, Dr. Robert Lankford, brought to Puerto Rico back in the 80's from a trip to Mexico (Fig. 1). Lankford, a close friend of the late Fred Berry (co-author of *Heliconia: An Identification Guide*), for many years sought to find the correct species name of this particular plant, but not much information was available.



Figure 1. Beautiful golden yellow inflorescence of *Heliconia* 'Mexican Gold'

Many collectors believe that 'Mexican Gold' is just another *H. latispatha*, and base their suppositions on the small rusty orange-red "spots" that the plant sometimes displays on the stems (Fig 2.). One particular characteristic of this plant is the

purplish shade seen on the border of the newly emerging leaves, on the underside of the leaf (Fig. 3).



Figure 2. Rusty orange-red "spots" on *Heliconia* 'Mexican Gold' stems.



Figure 3. Purplish border on the underside of a *Heliconia* 'Mexican Gold' leaf.

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, December 17, 2006. Home of Bryan and Yarisá Brunner, Hwy. 120, Km. 18.9 Int., Maricao, PR.

Heliconia 'Mexican Gold' and its Hybrids (continued)

We would really love to find an answer to this long questioning, especially due to the fact that this *Heliconia* has produced four stunning hybrids: 'Coral Surprise', 'German's Luck', 'Doña Aida' and 'Bleeding Heart'.

Seedlings of *Heliconia* 'Mexican Gold' With a Name of Their Own

Back in the 90's I started planting *Heliconias* from seed, even though many authors and collectors strongly advised against it, probably due to the fact that seeds of some *Heliconia* species, like *Heliconia chartacea*, take up to a year (and even longer, as I later learned) to germinate.

I found some very dark, almost black, round fruits inside the bracts of a *Heliconia* 'Mexican Gold' flower, planted them in a tray, and basically forgot about them. A few weeks later, passing by the tray, I observed that the stems of most of the seedlings were the normal green, but some had a soft shade of pink. I removed them, planted them, and observed them for a couple of years until they finally flowered in 2001, one after the other. Four seedlings, four surprises.

The first one was named 'Coral Surprise' because of the beautiful soft coral shades of the bracts (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Beautiful red color of *Heliconia* 'Coral Surprise'.

The second triggered my interest even before it flowered, because of the beautiful red upper stems (Fig. 5). When it finally flowered, its name just burst in my head: 'Bleeding Heart', for the soft-cherry-red color of the rachis.

When the third flowered, it was named to honor a wonderful human being and truly lover of *Heliconias*, my good friend Dr. German Charron, and thus 'German's Luck' came to be (Fig. 6).

The fourth and last, for some unknown reason, reminded me of my mother, Aida, and so I named it 'Doña Aida' (Fig. 7).

I'm a seed person. I deeply enjoy planting seeds, and seeing them turn into beautiful *Heliconias*, stunning gingers, magnificent trees. I could never throw a seed away! Their power... that is a matter of higher words.



Figure 5. Soft-cherry-red rachis of *Heliconia* 'Bleeding Heart'.

Heliconia 'Mexican Gold' and its Hybrids (continued)



Figure 6. *Heliconia* 'German's Luck'.



Figure 7. *Heliconia* 'Doña Aida'.

Growing and Using Edible Ginger By Sherry Ann Richerson, Contributor

Zingiber officinale, otherwise known as true ginger, is the source of ginger that is used in cooking and also medicinally. The rhizomes of this plant are dug up and ground, chopped or left whole and sent to local grocery stores. In early spring, it is possible to purchase a rhizome of ginger and plant it in your yard. The best rhizome to look for is a fresh, not dried, piece that has one to two inch long sections with well-developed growth buds. Given proper growing conditions, the stems will reach two to four feet tall with narrow, glossy green leaves that can get up to a foot long. Occasionally, your ginger will produce yellowish-green flowers with purple markings on the lip, although these are rarely seen. Rhizomes may be harvested at any time, but should be allowed to grow for at least three to four months before taking your first harvest.

Gingers prefer a lightly shaded, wind-free spot with good soil. Do not expect your ginger to bloom until it has been there for at least two years. Flowered canes should be removed yearly. Growing gingers can be very rewarding. Be sure to keep your humidity high or mist regularly and give them light shade and rich soil. Many other gingers exist that have not been covered here, but the basic requirements are the same. Ginger plays an interesting role in homeopathic medicine. It has been called the "universal medicine." Ginger has been used to treat diarrhea, indigestion and nausea to name a few. It also helps to neutralize acids and toxins in the digestive tract.

Ginger is a very versatile plant to grow and I highly recommend you growing one. Whether you prefer to grow it for ornamental purposes, culinary purposes or its healing properties this is a fantastic plant for your home or garden.



Edible ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) growing in the garden, with beautiful greenish red inflorescences.

Sheri Ann Richerson is a garden writer and owner of the Exotic Gardening website (www.exoticgardening.com).

HELICONIA SOCIETY OF PUERTO RICO, INC.

www.heliconiasocietypr.org

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HSPR

*Promoting Zingiberales in
Puerto Rico since 1996.*



The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc. was founded in 1996. The objectives of the society are to stimulate and promote the enjoyment and understanding of Heliconia and related plants of the order Zingiberales through education, research and communication, and to interact with the Heliconia Society International and other institutions which share similar interests, purposes or objectives.

President's Corner

Our September HSPR meeting was held at the home of Ray and Migdalia Jerome in Canóvanas. We had a good attendance and it was one of the most rewarding raffles ever. Sergio Tejedor donated numerous new and rare heliconia plants to a special raffle and there were numerous donations to the regular raffle. A great time was had by everyone. It seems that our raffles are one of our Society's most enjoyable events and they enable all members to reasonably enlarge their Zingiberales collections and thus contribute to Puerto Rico's conservation efforts to preserve these marvelous plants.

It was announced that HSPR's Co-Op Heliconia Conservation Project was accepted officially by The Heliconia Society International as being included along with their other international Conservation Centers. All members of HSPR included in this project were informed that they now must begin labeling (with permanent weather-proof labels) all of the plants that they included on their initial inventories. Sources for such permanent plastic label tags were distributed to all Conservation Project members that were present at the meeting. As volunteer Chairman of HSPR Co-Op Conservation Center, and keeper of the computerized records for them, I think that we should update our individual inventories each January, with all entries being in my possession by the end of the month of January. That way I can enter them into the computerized inventories and present them yearly to the HSI Board of Directors. To be included in all new inventory items are: the names of the plants, those that have bloomed, those that you wish to include in the up-date, where you got this specific plant, and deleting all plants that have been lost during the previous year. Your cooperation in this matter will be deeply appreciated and is of utmost importance in keeping up our acceptance as a Conservation Center with HSI. Also HSI informs me that from now on they will be sending out more issues of their bulletin per year than they have in the past.

Under considerable discussion at our last meeting was the question as to whether HSPR members want to use our funds for a "Heliconia Festival." Most members seemed to want this but, unfortunately, no one would volunteer to be chairperson of a committee to investigate the cost, locations, prices, insurance,

permits, and other items needed to hold such a meeting. Since our September meeting, I have met personally with several of our members who would be most involved in selling plants at such a meeting and there was unanimous agreement among them that such a festival is too involved to bring about this summer. These members felt that, if such a festival is truly desired by most of the membership, it should be postponed until a year from this summer to give adequate time for its development. It was well suggested that every member of HSPR who wants to participate in such a festival (selling plants, having displays, giving talks or demonstrations, etc.) will have to all meet together to see who will be selling what plants, who will be making displays, and who will be giving talks and demonstrations. From those attending such a meeting, they must select a chairperson to oversee all activities and have committee members dedicated to helping out the chairperson in whatever way is needed to find a suitable locations (at suitable prices), sources for display booths and prices, if such are desired, government permits to hold such a festival, insurances that are required, etc. All these things that are necessary for putting together such a festival. **THIS IS A HUGE UNDERTAKING AND SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY BY MEMBERS OF HSPR.** It is not nearly a simple as just saying "Oh boy, lets have a festival, that would be fun." Such a project requires a tremendous amount of work and time on the part of all of those who want to see such a project take shape. This topic will be discussed more in depth at HSPR's December meeting.

SPECIAL ATTENTION!!! THE DATE FOR OUR DECEMBER MEETING HAS BEEN MOVED FROM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH. TO SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17TH AT THE REQUEST OF OUR HOSTS. IT WILL BE HELD AT THE HOME OF BRYAN AND YARISA BRUNNER IN MARICAO.

Our December meeting is one of our most enjoyable meetings of the year. We will have a special presentation by Carmen Iris Ruiz on tropical flower arranging. Please plan to attend. We look forward to seeing all of you there.

Ray Jerome
President, HSPR