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CULTIVATION ASPECTS OF TURMERIC (CURCUMA LONGA L.): A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES, CROP MANAGEMENT, YIELD AND QUALITY

V. Narendhiran[1], B. Aishwarya[2], V. Gopi[3], M. Madhan[4], K. Meenu[5], K. Chozhan[6]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Horticulture, School of Agricultural Sciences, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Agri Business Management, School of Agricultural Sciences, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Horticulture, SRM College of Agricultural Sciences, Chengalpattu
[4]Junior Research Fellow, Department of Horticulture, School of Agricultural Sciences, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University
[5]PhD., Scholar, Department of Horticulture, School of Agricultural Sciences, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University
[6]Dean, School of Agricultural Sciences, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Tamil Nadu, India; Email. narendhiranv.sas@dsuniversity.ac.in

ABSTRACT
Turmeric (Curcuma longa L.) is an economically important rhizomatous spice and medicinal crop of the Zingiberaceae family. The crop is valued for its fresh and dried rhizomes, curcuminoids, essential oils, natural colour, culinary applications and expanding nutraceutical and pharmaceutical uses. Productivity and quality are determined by the interaction of genotype, planting material, climate, soil, crop geometry, nutrition, water availability, weed competition, pests, diseases and post-harvest handling. This review consolidates current knowledge on turmeric cultivation, beginning with agro-climatic and soil requirements and extending through propagation, seed-rhizome management, planting, nutrient and water management, mulching, weed control, integrated pest and disease management, sustainable production, harvesting and post-harvest processing. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of disease-free planting material, balanced nutrition, efficient irrigation and drainage, organic matter management, biological inputs and quality-oriented production. Emerging approaches including rapid multiplication, precision irrigation, fertigation, bio stimulants, microbial inoculants, digital crop monitoring and mechanization are also discussed. The review further considers major production constraints, climate-related risks and research priorities for improving resource-use efficiency, yield, curcuminoid quality and farm profitability. Integration of site-specific agronomic practices with improved planting material and quality-conscious post-harvest management offers a practical pathway towards sustainable and commercially competitive turmeric production.

KEYWORDS: Curcuma longa; turmeric; rhizome; seed rhizome; cultivation; nutrient management; irrigation; curcuminoids; integrated crop management; sustainable production

INTRODUCTION
Turmeric (Curcuma longa L.) is one of the most widely cultivated rhizomatous spice crops in tropical and subtropical agriculture. It has a long history of use as a culinary spice, colouring material and traditional medicinal ingredient. The crop is now associated with a broad value chain involving fresh rhizomes, dried turmeric, powder, oleoresin, essential oils, curcuminoid extracts, nutraceutical products and other value-added commodities. India is a major centre of turmeric production, consumption and trade, and the crop contributes substantially to the livelihood of growers, processors and traders. Turmeric is vegetatively propagated, making planting-material quality a central component of crop productivity. Infected or physiologically weak rhizomes can lead to poor establishment and dissemination of soil- and rhizome-borne pathogens. At the field level, productivity is influenced by soil physical condition, nutrient availability, moisture regime, crop geometry and the duration of the growing season. Excess moisture and inadequate drainage favour rhizome diseases, whereas prolonged moisture stress restricts vegetative growth and rhizome bulking.

Modern turmeric production increasingly requires simultaneous attention to yield, quality, resource efficiency and environmental safety. Market demand is expanding beyond conventional spice use towards curcuminoid-rich raw material, natural colourants and health-oriented products. Consequently, cultivation practices that improve dry recovery, colour, curcuminoid concentration, microbial quality and residue compliance are becoming increasingly important. A production package based solely on maximum fresh-rhizome yield is therefore insufficient for a quality-oriented value chain.

Botanical Characteristics and Taxonomic Position
Curcuma longa L. belongs to the family Zingiberaceae and is a perennial rhizomatous herb cultivated commercially as an annual crop. The crop develops a pseudostem from overlapping leaf sheaths, broad leaves and an underground rhizome system consisting of a mother rhizome and lateral fingers. Rhizome development is the principal determinant of economic yield.

Genotypes differ in plant stature, maturity duration, rhizome shape, dry recovery, colour, essential oil profile and curcuminoid concentration.

Origin, Distribution and Economic Importance

Turmeric is associated historically with South and Southeast Asia and has become established in many tropical and subtropical production regions. Its economic importance is supported by demand from domestic spice markets and by food, cosmetic, nutraceutical and pharmaceutical industries. Quality attributes such as curcuminoid concentration, colour value, moisture, microbial safety and pesticide-residue status increasingly influence the price and suitability of turmeric for specialized markets.

Agro-climatic Requirements

Warm and humid conditions are generally favourable for turmeric growth. A temperature range of approximately 20–35 °C supports sprouting, vegetative development and rhizome growth, although optimum conditions vary with genotype and stage. Low temperatures can delay sprouting and crop establishment, while high temperature combined with water deficit can reduce canopy development and rhizome bulking.

The crop is commonly grown under monsoon rainfall and performs well where moisture is adequately distributed during the vegetative and rhizome-development phases. Rainfall requirements vary with soil, season, cultivar and irrigation availability. Excess rainfall and poor drainage can be more damaging than short periods of moderate moisture deficit because saturated conditions favour rhizome and basal diseases.

Turmeric tolerates partial shade and can occur in traditional intercropping or agroforestry systems. However, excessive shade may reduce photosynthetic activity and dry-rhizome yield. Canopy density, cultivar vigour and the light environment should therefore be considered when designing mixed cropping systems.

Soil Requirements and Land Preparation

Deep, friable, fertile and well-drained soils are generally suitable for turmeric. Loam, sandy loam and clay loam soils can support productive crops when physical condition and drainage are adequate. Heavy, compacted or poorly drained fields require improvement through raised beds, drainage channels and organic matter management. Soil testing before planting is recommended for site-specific nutrient management. Land preparation should produce a loose and aerated rooting zone without excessive pulverization. Well-decomposed farmyard manure, compost or other locally suitable organic amendments can improve soil structure, moisture retention and nutrient supply. Raised beds and ridges-and-furrows are especially useful in high-rainfall areas or soils where temporary waterlogging is likely.

Propagation and Quality Planting Material

Turmeric is propagated vegetatively using healthy mother rhizomes or finger rhizomes. Planting material should be true to type, physiologically mature, vigorous and free from visible insect injury and disease symptoms. Rhizomes from healthy fields should be preferred because vegetative propagation can efficiently transmit pathogens from one crop generation to the next. Rhizome size affects the amount of stored reserve available during sprouting and early establishment. Larger, healthy planting pieces generally support stronger initial growth, but optimum seed size and seed rate depend on cultivar, production system and cost of planting material. Rapid multiplication and protected nursery approaches offer opportunities to increase the availability of clean planting material and improve field uniformity.

Seed Rhizome Treatment

Seed-rhizome treatment is an important preventive component of integrated crop management. Depending on regional recommendations and regulatory approval, appropriate fungicidal or biological treatments may be used to reduce surface-associated pathogens and improve establishment. Trichoderma-based and other microbial formulations have received attention as components of biological disease-management programmes. Treatment cannot compensate for severely infected or poor-quality planting material. Rhizomes showing soft rot, severe discoloration, insect damage or other suspicious symptoms should be discarded. Seed production under disease-managed conditions and the use of clean propagation material are fundamental to long-term crop health.

Planting Time, Spacing and Planting Method

Planting is generally synchronized with the onset of warm weather and adequate soil moisture. In rainfed systems, planting commonly follows the beginning of the monsoon, whereas irrigated production can be adjusted according to local climate and market requirements. Timely establishment provides a longer period for canopy development and subsequent rhizome bulking. Turmeric may be planted on raised beds, ridges and furrows or level beds depending on soil texture, rainfall and irrigation. A commonly used spacing range is approximately 30–45 cm between rows and 15–25 cm between plants, although recommendations differ among cultivars and production environments. Excessively close spacing can intensify competition and canopy humidity, while very wide spacing can reduce land-use efficiency.

Nutrient Management

Turmeric produces substantial vegetative biomass and subsequently develops a large underground storage organ. Nitrogen is important for canopy development, phosphorus contributes to early root and plant development, and potassium plays a major role in water relations, assimilate transport and rhizome development. The optimum nutrient balance varies with soil fertility, cultivar and yield target. Integrated nutrient management combines mineral fertilizers with organic manures, composts, green manures and beneficial microorganisms. Soil-test-based fertilizer application is preferable to uniform blanket recommendations. Split application of nitrogen and potassium can improve nutrient-use efficiency and reduce losses in comparison with excessive single applications. Excess nitrogen may stimulate luxuriant foliage without a proportional increase in rhizome yield and can create an imbalanced crop canopy. Secondary and micronutrients should be applied when deficiency is confirmed by soil or plant diagnosis. Organic matter contributes to nutrient cycling and improves soil physical properties, but nutrient concentration in organic materials is variable. Therefore, nutrient budgeting should consider the actual nutrient contribution of each amendment rather than treating all organic inputs as nutritionally equivalent.

Irrigation and Water Management

Adequate soil moisture is essential during establishment, vegetative growth and rhizome enlargement. Irrigation scheduling should be based on rainfall, soil texture, crop stage and atmospheric demand. The crop should not be maintained continuously under saturated conditions. Good drainage is therefore an essential component of irrigation management, particularly in heavy soils and high-rainfall environments. Drip irrigation can improve water-use efficiency by delivering water directly to the root zone and can be combined with fertigation where appropriate. Mulching further reduces evaporative losses and moderates soil temperature. Irrigation should be reduced or adjusted as the crop approaches physiological maturity, depending on soil and weather conditions.

Weed Management and Intercultural Operations

Turmeric is vulnerable to weed competition during early establishment because the canopy requires time to develop. Integrated weed management combines mulching, timely manual or mechanical weeding and, where legally permitted, registered herbicides. Weed control should be concentrated during the early competitive period and should avoid mechanical injury to developing rhizomes. Earthing-up or covering soil around the clumps supports rhizome development and can reduce exposure of developing rhizomes. Field sanitation, removal of diseased plants and maintenance of functional drainage channels are complementary intercultural practices.

Integrated Pest Management

Turmeric is affected by a range of insect pests, including shoot borers, leaf-feeding insects, scales and rhizome-associated pests. Incidence varies with region, season, cultivar and crop management. Regular field scouting should guide management decisions. Integrated pest management emphasizes healthy planting material, field sanitation, balanced nutrition, conservation of natural enemies, biological control and need-based application of registered pesticides. Shoot borer management can include regular monitoring, removal of infested shoots and appropriate biological or chemical measures when economic thresholds justify intervention. Avoidance of unnecessary broad-spectrum insecticides helps conserve natural enemies and reduces selection pressure for resistance. Any chemical intervention should comply with current national registration, label directions and pre-harvest requirements.

Integrated Disease Management

Rhizome rot and other soil- and seed-borne diseases are major constraints in turmeric. Typical symptoms include yellowing and wilting of foliage, basal pseudostem discoloration and decay of rhizomes. Disease development is favoured by infected planting material, poor drainage, excessive soil moisture and continuous cultivation without effective sanitation. A robust disease-management programme integrates healthy seed, seed-rhizome treatment, drainage, crop rotation, sanitation, removal of diseased clumps and biological control. Trichoderma and other beneficial microorganisms may be incorporated into integrated programmes where locally validated. Chemical fungicides should be used only when registered and recommended for the crop and disease concerned.

Cropping Systems and Intercropping

Turmeric can be incorporated into diverse cropping systems. Suitable intercrops can improve land-use efficiency, but companion crops should not impose excessive competition for light, water or nutrients. Partial-shade systems may be appropriate in selected environments, provided that the resulting microclimate does not increase disease pressure or reduce rhizome productivity.

Harvesting and Maturity

Turmeric is generally harvested after the foliage and pseudostems turn yellow and progressively dry. Many cultivars mature in approximately seven to nine months, although duration varies with genotype, environment and production objective. Harvesting too early may reduce rhizome size and dry recovery, whereas excessive delay may expose the crop to pests, diseases and adverse weather. Manual harvesting remains common, while mechanization is increasingly relevant where labour availability is limited. Soil moisture should be suitable for lifting to minimize rhizome breakage and skin injury. Harvested rhizomes should be handled carefully because mechanical damage can accelerate microbial deterioration during storage and processing.

Post-harvest Handling and Curing

Fresh rhizomes are cleaned and separated from roots and pseudostem residues before curing. Traditional curing involves boiling or steaming followed by drying. The process reduces moisture and develops the characteristic colour and physical properties of dried turmeric. Uniform heating and drying are necessary to obtain consistent quality and minimize microbial contamination. Sun drying remains widely practiced, while controlled mechanical drying can provide greater consistency and hygiene. Dried fingers should be stored in clean, dry and well-ventilated conditions and protected from insects, rodents, moisture and contamination. Packaging and storage conditions influence colour retention, moisture stability and market quality.

Yield and Quality Attributes

Fresh-rhizome yield is influenced by genotype, plant population, soil fertility, water availability, crop duration and disease pressure. However, fresh yield alone does not fully represent commercial value. Dry recovery, curcuminoid content, volatile oil composition, colour, moisture, microbial safety and pesticide residues may be critical depending on the end use. Curcuminoid concentration has a strong genetic component but may also vary with environmental conditions, crop maturity and post-harvest processing. Consequently, future agronomic evaluation should measure both productivity and quality traits. Multi-location trials are needed to understand genotype × environment × management interactions.

Major Production Constraints

Important constraints include inadequate quality planting material, rhizome-borne diseases, variable rainfall, drought, waterlogging, weed competition, labour scarcity, high input costs and inconsistent post-harvest quality. Limited access to certified planting material, soil testing, mechanization and premium markets can further reduce profitability for smallholders.

Future Research Priorities

Future research should prioritize disease-free and genetically pure planting material, high-curcuminoid cultivars, genotype × environment evaluation, nutrient-use efficiency, precision irrigation and fertigation, biological disease suppression, mechanized production and residue-free cultivation. Research should increasingly connect agronomic practices with post-harvest quality and market requirements.

There is substantial scope for integrating crop science with molecular breeding, metabolomics, remote sensing, artificial intelligence and digital decision-support systems. Production recommendations should be evaluated not only for yield but also for profitability, water productivity, nutrient-use efficiency, soil health, greenhouse-gas implications and product quality.

CONCLUSION

Turmeric cultivation is an integrated production system in which planting-material quality, soil health, water availability, balanced nutrition and pest and disease management interact to determine productivity and quality. Healthy planting rhizomes, timely establishment, suitable crop geometry, adequate moisture with effective drainage, balanced nutrition, early weed management and preventive disease control form the foundation of successful production. The future of turmeric cultivation lies in combining improved and quality-oriented cultivars with clean planting material, precision resource management, biological approaches, mechanization and improved post-harvest technologies. Greater emphasis on curcuminoid quality, residue-free production and climate resilience can improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the crop. Site-specific recommendations supported by multi-location research will be essential for converting emerging technologies into dependable farmer-ready production systems.

Recommended Cultivation Parameters

Parameter	General recommendation
Botanical name	Curcuma longa L.
Family	Zingiberaceae
Propagation	Healthy mother or finger rhizomes
Temperature	Approximately 20–35 °C; warm conditions preferred
Soil	Fertile, friable and well-drained loam to clay loam
Planting season	Onset of suitable monsoon (June – August)
Planting geometry	Commonly 30–45 cm between rows and 15–25 cm between plants; cultivar dependent
Crop duration	Generally about seven to nine months; cultivar and environment dependent
Water management	Adequate moisture with effective drainage

Mulching	Organic mulch soon after planting and renewed as required
Harvest maturity	Yellowing and drying of foliage and mature rhizomes

Integrated Crop Management Priorities

Management component	Primary objective	Key approach
Planting material	Uniform establishment and disease prevention	Healthy, true-to-type rhizomes; appropriate seed management
Soil management	Root and rhizome development	Good tilth, drainage, organic matter and soil-test-based amendments
Nutrition	Yield and quality	Balanced nutrition supported by organic and biological inputs
Water	Avoid stress and waterlogging	Irrigation scheduling, drainage and mulching
Weed management	Reduce early competition	Mulching and timely manual/mechanical control; registered herbicides where appropriate
Pest management	Prevent economic damage	Scouting, sanitation, biological control and need-based registered pesticides
Disease management	Prevent rhizome losses	Clean seed, drainage, rotation and integrated biological/chemical measures
Post-harvest	Preserve quality	Careful harvest, curing, drying and hygienic storage

Author Contribution and Declaration

The manuscript is intended as a review of published knowledge on turmeric cultivation. Before submission, all bibliographic details, cultivar-specific recommendations, pesticide registrations and quantitative fertilizer recommendations should be checked against the latest primary literature and official regional recommendations.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to this review

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