

Alocasia macrorrhiza

[Synonyms : *Alocasia alba*, *Alocasia brisbanensis*, *Alocasia crassifolia*, *Alocasia grandis*, *Alocasia indica*, *Alocasia macrorrhizon*, *Alocasia macrorrhizos*, *Arum indicum*, *Arum macrorrhizon*, *Arum macrorrhizum*, *Calla badian*, *Calla maxima*, *Colocasia indica*, *Colocasia macrorrhizos*, *Philodendron peregrinum*]

GIANT TARO is a perennial. Native to south-eastern Asia (especially Indomalaysia) it has a large spike of tiny unpleasant-smelling, yellowish-green flowers shielded by a very large, petal-like yellow to green leaf.

It is also known as *Alocasia* (Italian, German, Spanish), *Alocásia* (Portuguese), *Alocasie* (French), *Alocasie à grandes racines* (French), *Alocasie à grosse racines* (French), *Alokasia* (Swedish), *Alokasie* (German), *Alokazja olbrzymia* (Polish), *Ápe* (Hawaiian, Tahitian), *Birah* (Malay), *Cunjevoi* (Australian Aboriginal, English), *Daun keladi* (Malay), *Elephant's ear*, *Ghempe tarul* (Nepalese), *Giant alocasia*, *Giant elephant's ear*, *Hải vu* (Vietnamese), *Hai yu* (Chinese), *Hastikarni* (Sanskrit), *Indo kuwazu imo* (Japanese), *Jättialokasia* (Finnish), *Kape* (Tongan), *Keladi* (Malay), *Kradat* (Thai), *Kradat daeng* (Thai), *Kra dao* (Thai), *Malabiga* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Malanga* (Spanish), *Mankachu* (Bengali, Hindi), *Orecchio di elephante* (Italian), *Ráy* (Vietnamese), *Sénté* (Javanese, Sundanese), *Spoon lily*, *Taámu* (Samoan), *Taro*, and *Via* (Fijian).

Warning - the whole plant contains poisonous milky sap with needle-like crystals of a substance which, if swallowed, can be extremely painful and cause swelling of the mouth and throat (even known in the past to be fatal on occasion). [It is claimed that this can be neutralised gradually with vinegar or lemon juice.]

Macrorrhiza is made up of Greek *macro-* (large, long) and *-rrhiza* (root) components meaning 'large-rooted or with large root stocks'.

The leaves, that can reach nearly 10 ft. by 6½ ft. in size, are said to be the largest known undivided leaves in the world.

Authorities believe that it was the adventurous Polynesian sailors who introduced giant taro to Hawaii over 1500 years ago.

In some areas the large underground stems, after roasting or rigorous boiling, provide food – most usually emergency rations when there is a shortage of rice (*Oryza*) or other food.

Authorities believe that precautionary care (some records describe how the tuber is spiked with a stick to ease the handling of it in order to avoid unnecessarily exposing any skin to its touch) and the long cooking process needed have deterred greater acceptance of it as an everyday food.

In some places giant taro is grown as an ornamental plant.

Medicinally, the plant's sap has provided a local antidote for some plant and insect stings. In Java particularly the chopped roots and leaves have been applied in poultices to painful joints, in India the roots have been used to neutralise the effects of scorpion stings, and in Hawaii the plant has not only provided an ingredient for a laxative but has also been used in the form of a salve to ease burns.