

*Dioscorea alata*

[Synonyms : *Dioscorea aculeata* var. *purpurea*, *Dioscorea atropurpurea*, *Dioscorea colocasiifolia*, *Dioscorea globosa*, *Dioscorea glombosa*, *Dioscorea purpurea*, *Dioscorea rubella*, *Dioscorea sapinii*, *Dioscorea sativa*, *Rajania flexuosa*]

**WHITE YAM** is a twining, climbing vine. Native to tropical Asia (particularly India and the southern Pacific), it has small greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Afasew* (Twi), Arrowroot, Asiatic yam, *Bango nari* (Bengali), *Câm kênh* (Vietnamese), *Chupri alu* (Bengali, Hindi), *Cò sa* (Vietnamese), *Củ cái* (Vietnamese), *Củ câm* (Vietnamese), *Củ canh* (Vietnamese), *Củ đở* (Vietnamese), *Củ lỗ* (Vietnamese), *Củ mỡ* (Vietnamese), *Củ ngà* (Vietnamese), *Củ nhà* (Vietnamese), *Củ tía* (Vietnamese), *Củ vac* (Vietnamese), *Daijo* (Japanese), *Daijyo* (Japanese), *Da shu* (Chinese), *Dioscoreia krylataia* (Russian), *Dioskoreia alata* (Russian), *Dukka pendalam* (Telugu), *Geflügelter Yam* (German), *Ghara tarul* (Nepalese), *Grande igname* (French), Greater water yam, Greater yam, *Gunapendalamu* (Telugu), Guyana arrowroot, *Hoi* (Hawaiian), *Houo* (Laotian), *Huwi* (Sundanese), *Iams belyi* (Russian), *Iams krylatyi* (Russian), *Igname* (French), *Igname ailée* (French), *Igname de Chine* (French), *Inhame da India* (Portuguese), *Kaavathu* (Malayalam), *Kambo alu* (Oriya), *Karavalu-kelengu* (Tamil), *Kham alu* (Bengali), *Khamalu* (Hindi), *Khoai buròu* (Vietnamese), *Khoai long* (Vietnamese), *Khoai mỡ* (Vietnamese), *Khoai ngà* (Vietnamese), *Khoai ngọt* (Vietnamese), *Khoai tía* (Vietnamese), *Khoai trắng* (Vietnamese), *Khoai trút* (Vietnamese), *Khoai vac* (Vietnamese), *Kukur tarul* (Nepalese), *Man* (Thai), *Măn hăm* (Vietnamese), *Mulu valli* (Tamil), *Myauk uu ni* (Burmese), *Ñame blanco* (Spanish), *Ñame de agua* (Spanish), Negro country yam, *Niluva pendalam* (Telugu), *Niluvapendalamu* (Telugu), *Niluvu pendalam* (Telugu), *Pendalamu* (Telugu), *Perumvalli kilangu* (Tamil), *Peruvalli* (Tamil), *Pindalu* (Sanskrit), *Pokok ubi* (Malay), *Shen shu* (Chinese), *Tabena* (Spanish), *Tai shue* (Chinese), *Taw myauk uu* (Burmese), Ten-months yam, The yam bacara, *Tuna genasu* (Kannada), *Ubi* (Malay, Filipino/Tagalog), *Ufi* (Samoan, Tongan), *Uhi* (Hawaiian), *Uvi* (Fijian), *Uwi* (Javanese), *Wasseryam* (German), Water yam, White Guinea yam, White Manila yam, White winged yam, Winged yam, Wing-stalked yam, Yam, *Yams kallu* (Tamil), and *Yanm* (Creole).

The tubers (that can weigh anything up to 45 lb.) yield a starchy extract known as Guiana arrowroot.

Warning – unprocessed tubers are poisonous and can cause internal and external irritation. *Alata* is derived from Latin *ala* (wing) meaning ‘winged’.

The name Ten-months yam is an explicit reference to the time needed for tubers to develop. Authorities ponder the possibility that the skilled Polynesian sailors who settled in Hawaii introduced white yam to the Islands from the other side of the Pacific where it has long been a staple vegetable. Not least the tubers would have been ideal food for a long sea journey because they would keep well. Many of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century European explorers who sailed into harbour in Hawaii were greeted, almost before their anchors were down, by the local Hawaiians who boarded the visitors’ vessels with Island produce, notably yams. So much so that it seems from many records that Hawaii must almost have been synonymous with a yam trading post. Today however yams are

relatively rare there.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century once the Europeans had penetrated tropical Asia the yams were carried westward. The Portuguese introduced them to their trading posts on either side of the Atlantic, including those on the west African coast. From the latter where they were cultivated supplies of yams reached Lisbon and became a common sight in the slave market there. Once the Portuguese had recognized the importance of their keeping properties yams had become a staple on their slave ships that crossed the Atlantic to the New World.

The tubers are a major source of local food and are eaten stewed, or fried. They have also been fermented for a kind of beer. In the south-eastern United States white yams are fed to livestock.

The starch is used widely in confectionery and cookery despite the fact that some contend it is of poor quality.

Medicinally, the tubers have been used in India in the treatment of leprosy, some venereal disease and piles.