

Dioscorea bulbifera

[Synonyms : *Dioscorea anthropophagorum*, *Dioscorea anthropophagum*, *Dioscorea bulbifera* var. *anthropophagorum*, *Dioscorea bulbifera* var. *sativa*, *Dioscorea crispata*, *Dioscorea heterophylla*, *Dioscorea hoffa*, *Dioscorea hofika*, *Dioscorea latifolia*, *Dioscorea longipetiolata*, *Dioscorea oppositifolia*, *Dioscorea pappularis*, *Dioscorea perrieri*, *Dioscorea pulchella*, *Dioscorea sativa*, *Dioscorea tamifolia*, *Dioscorea tamnifolia*, *Dioscorea versicolor*, *Dioscorea violacea*, *Helmia bulbifera*]

AIR YAM is a climbing perennial vine. Native to tropical south-eastern Asia (especially India, Malaysia, Polynesia) it has fragrant white flowers.

It is also known as Acom yam, *Adavi dumpa* (Telugu), Aerial yam, *Ah lu thi* (Burmese), Air potato, Air potato yam, *Akam* (Twi), *Banal* (Bengali), *Bayag-kabáyo* (Filipino/Tagalog), Bitter yam, Bulbil-bearing yam, Caribbean potato, *Chedupaddu-dumpa* (Telugu), Cheeky yam, *Củ dái* (Vietnamese), *Dukarkand* (Gujarati), *Gaithi* (Hindi), *Gitthaa* (Nepalese), *Gitthe tarul* (Nepalese), *Hoei oepas* (Hindi), Hoi (English, Hawaiian, Tongan), *Houo i mou* (Laotian), *Hpwut sa uu* (Burmese), *Huang du* (Chinese), *Huang yao* (Chinese), *Huwi blichik* (Sundanese), *Iams lukovitsenosnyi* (Russian), *Igname bulbifère* (French), *Igname pousse en l'air* (French), *Jada bis* (Nepalese), *Jěbubug basu* (Javanese), *Kaattukkaayvalli* (Tamil), *Kaayvalli* (Tamil), *Kadu kand* (Marathi), *Kaile* (Fijian), *Kartoffelyam* (German), *Karukanda* (Hindi, Telugu), *Karu-karinda* (Marathi), *Karu kunda* (Hindi), *Kashuu imo* (Japanese), *Khoai dái* (Vietnamese), *Khoai tròi* (Vietnamese), *Knollen-Yam* (German), *La sa mi* (Thai), *Luft-Kartoffel* (German), *Luft-Yams* (German), *Kodikilangu* (Tamil), Malacca yam, *Malaka kayependalamu* (Telugu), *Man i mo* (Thai), *Man khamin* (Thai), *Man-nok* (Thai), *Man pau* (Laotian), *Masako* (French), *Masoco* (French), *Masoko* (Creole), *Mataru* (Marathi), *Ñame criollo* (Spanish, Venezuelan), *Ñame de aire* (Colombian, Spanish), *Ñame de gunda* (Spanish), *Ñame volador* (Cuban, Spanish), *Niervaren* (Dutch), *Niga kashuu* (Japanese), Otaheite potato, Otaheite yam, *Pannu kilangu* (Tamil), *Papa cimarrona* (Mexican, Spanish), *Papa de aire* (Spanish), *Papa voladora* (Spanish), *Pat sa uu* (Burmese), *Pita alu* (Oriya), *Pomme en l'air* (French), Potato yam, *Ratalu* (Hindi), *Roth alu* (Bengali), *Soi* (Samoan), *Ubi-atas* (Malay), *Ubi ubihan* (Tagalog), *Utong utongan* (Tagalog), *Van tarul* (Nepalese), *Wan phra chim* (Thai), *Wan sam phan dtang* (Thai), *Wan sam phan thueng* (Thai), and Yam pule.

Air yam has small, kidney-shaped underground tubers but larger tubers. in leaf axils above ground. The latter can be 8-12 in. long and can weigh. several pounds.

Warning – the unprocessed tubers (whether underground or aerial) can be poisonous.

Bulbifera is derived from Latin *bulbi-* (bulb) and *-fer* (bearing, carrying) components meaning ‘producing small bulbs’ with reference to the bulbils or tubers in the leaf axils.

Before the bitter-tasting tubers (from both above and below ground) are cooked for food they are processed to neutralise their poisonous qualities. This is usually achieved by cutting them up or grating them and soaking them in running water or repeatedly washing and straining them. Some of the cultivated varieties are more edible than the wild plants. The latter are known to be variable in their toxicity. The tubers are eaten in tropical Asia although authorities note that they are largely viewed there as famine food. In Hawaii,

where they are believed to have been introduced by the Polynesians, they are one of the most common yams consumed. At the time of the Slave Trade the tubers, boiled and mashed, provided food for the American Negroes – and white Americans ground the tubers for bread flour and puddings. No doubt influenced by the tortuous preliminary preparations the tubers are not a significant source of food today although they are still cultivated on a small scale in south-eastern Asia, tropical South America, the Caribbean and parts of the southern United States.

Certainly in the 1970s this was the species of *Disocorea* most often grown in the United States – and in the southern states it has become invasive.

On the island of Borneo (which today is divided into three states, two of which are part of Indonesia and the other of Malaysia) some of the tribes adopted the shape of the leaf in their designs.

Medicinally, the tubers are used in India to treat dysentery, piles and venereal diseases. And they are also applied in poultices to external ulcers.