

AROIDS: THE WORLD'S OLDEST FOOD CROP

AROIDS (L. ARACEAE)

Aroids, or taro, is a common name for plants belonging to the Araceae family of plants. The aroid plant family comprises of more than 120 genera and 3750 species of which many are used as food, medicine, animal fodder, ornamental plants and cut flowers. The main centres of origin and diversity of aroids are tropical Asia and tropical America.

CULTIVATED AROIDS

The five most important cultivated aroids, used as food are:

- Elephant ear (L. *Alacasia*),
- Elephant foot yam (L. *Amorphophallus*),
- Swamp taro (L. *Cyrtosperma*),
- Taro (L. *Colocasia*),
- Tannia (L. *Xanthosoma*).

Aroids are among the six most important roots and tuber crops, and rank fourteenth among staple vegetable crops.

ORIGIN

Aroids are the world's oldest food crops, and were the most widely distributed starchy food plants during the 16th and 19th century. Cultivation already occurred when rice and wheat were just weeds. Archaeological evidence from the Solomon Islands suggests that taro was already in use around 28,700 years ago.



Solomon Islands, Taro

CULTIVATION

Aroids are a staple crop for several hundred million small farmers throughout the tropical world. It is roughly estimated that around 500 million people are involved in the cultivation, consumption and trade of aroids. Today, taro and tannia are widely grown in tropical and subtropical temperate areas throughout the world.



Melanesia, Taro



Costa Rica, Tannia



Micronesia, Swamp Taro



Solomon Islands, Taro

CONSUMPTION

Aroids are almost exclusively eaten by the populations of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and immigrant communities from these areas that are living in dense urban areas in the Western Hemisphere. Common and ancient preparation techniques are baking, roasting, boiling, drying and fermentation.

AROIDS & THE WORLD (numbers x billion)

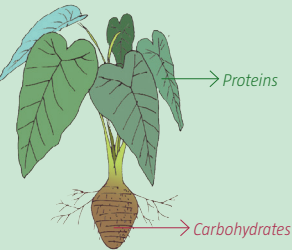


USCB 2012 & FAO 2010 estimates

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

All plant parts of aroids are edible, and have good nutritional qualities. The roots and tubers are versatile and rich in carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, as well as being hypoallergenic. The leaves, stems and petioles are frequently eaten as a green vegetable and represent an important source of vitamins, especially folic acid.

MACRONUTRIENTS



CULTURAL & CULINARY HERITAGE

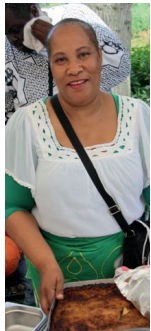
Aroids and aroid dishes, are also part of national, local, culinary and cultural heritage in numerous communities in and from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Polynesia. In many cultures aroids are sacred plants with high prestige and carry a deeply symbolic meaning and strong cultural value, intrinsic to cultural identity.



Africa, Fufu



Hawaii, Poi



Surinam, Pom

GLOBAL CULTIVATION & CONSUMPTION

