

TARO 芋

93-2-2

(Colocasia antiquorum)

(Other Names: Taro Root, Dasheen)

Taro is a fast growing perennial which is usually grown in frost free areas. It is very popular in the Far East as staple food. In the United States, Hawaii leads the production with several varieties. Up to 200 varieties exist, however, only 4 or 5 cultivars are popular as vegetables. They differ in size of plants and tubers. The edible part of taro are tubers (the underground stems, similar to potato). The tubers of different varieties or cultivars range from 2 to 10 inches in length and from a few ounces to 5 pounds in weight. The tubers are more or less brown in color, covered with hairs and are encircled with rings from which the leaves arise. Dormant buds, either visible or invisible, may develop in the axils of these leaves. Buds sprout and grow into giant elephant ear leaves up to 2 feet long and 1 foot wide, carried on 4-5 stalks, like rhubarb.



HOW TO GROW: Taro, which can tolerate hot, wet, dry and shady environments, is very easy to grow. The growing season may be as long as 8 months, suitable for tropic areas. It grows best in the rainy and hot seasons and prefers heavy or loam soils. It is a good idea for home gardeners to grow taro on the bank of a stream, if one is available in the back yard. If a stream is not available, frequent watering will keep the soil moist. In cold areas, plants can be started indoors by burying tubers in damp sand or peat moss in a warm place until the buds appear, these are usually pink in color. Transplant them into the garden when the weather becomes warm. Dig trenches about 6 inches deep and 2 feet wide, in rows 3 feet apart, and place the entire tubers in, with the buds facing upward. Cover the tubers with earth until they are about 4 inches deep. Water thoroughly after planting. To save home garden space, interplant with other short season vegetables which will be harvested before the taro grows tall. If you have well rotted animal manure, dig the trench 8-10 inches deep and mix with manure, then plant the tubers. To keep the soil moist, thoroughly water and mulch the ground in June and July.

WHEN TO PLANT: In the tropic areas, taro can be grown all year round. Because of the long growing season, it is usually best to plant or transplant in the spring and harvest in the fall. Best results are obtained by planting the tubers directly into the garden in March or April and harvest in the fall.

CARE AND HARVEST: Since taro grows best in wet soil, frequent watering is important. Because of the long growing season, fertilize 2-3 times during the growing period. The new tubers develop from the upper part of the planted tubers. They tend to grow on the soil surface, therefore, pull some soil to the base of the plants to cover the new tubers during each cultivation. At the end of the growing season, around August or September, the leaves begin to turn yellow. Now is the time to harvest. Dig the tubers with a fork and dry for one day. Storage of tubers in a cold place prevents buds from sprouting. In frost free areas, tubers can be left in the ground for a long time.

USES: Taro tuber flesh is white or creamy and rich in starch. They are used as vegetables as well as a staple food. It substitutes admirably for potatoes in almost any recipe. The flesh is more cheesy or moist than that of a potato. Nutritionally, taro has slightly more protein and minerals than its counterpart the potato. The tuber may be steamed, boiled, or baked. Some Chinese people

simply boil , peel and eat them with sugar. Taro may be baked in a hot oven (400°F) until it feels soft, about 35 minutes. Taro contains calcium oxalate which must be cooked to be eaten; do not eat it raw. The tubers are usually boiled first to destroy the calcium oxalate crystals and then used in mixed vegetables and meat dishes, fried in stripes, or sliced for chips.

RECIPES:

1. Sweet Braised Taro

Ingredients:

2-3 cups	Taro. Peeled and chopped into chunks.
1 clove	Garlic, minced.
1-2 tblsp	Black beans
1 cup	Pork (preferably half fat-half lean), chopped.
2-3 tsp	Dark Soysauce
1-2 tsp	Light Soysauce
1 tsp	Sugar
2 tblsp	Oil

Procedure:

1. Mash garlic with black beans.
2. Heat oil in fry pan, fry bean mash. Add pork to sear briefly then add taro.
3. Stir and cook until lightly browned. Then transfer to saucepan. Add soysauce, sugar and 1/2 cup of water.
4. Simmer 30-45 minutes or until taro is tender. Stir occasionally and add water as necessary to prevent burning.
5. Adjust seasoning and serve.

2. Steamed Pork and Taro

Ingredients:

1-1/2 cups	Taro
1/2 cup	Lean pork, minced and seasoned.
1 cup	Chicken broth
1 tsp	Salt
1 tblsp	Vegetable oil
1 tsp	Cornstarch

Procedure:

1. Combine all ingredients.
2. Add approximately 1/4 cup of hot water, season with salt and pepper, chicken broth, vegetable oil and cornstarch. Mix well.
3. Place in shallow dish or enamel pan. Steam over boiling water until pork is cooked.

Note: You may add Chinese mushrooms (soaked and chopped), bamboo shoots (chopped), or dried shrimp (soaked and minced).

3. Taro Snack Chips

Ingredients:

1/2 lb	Taro. Scrub taro root well. Cook taro whole in boiling water for 35-40 minutes or until tender. Peel roots. Chill thoroughly. Slice roots crosswise into 1/4 inch thick slices.
1/2 cup	Sesame oil (optional)
	Peanut oil or other vegetable oil
	Toasted sesame seed
	Grated Parmesan Cheese
	Chili powder

Procedure:

1. Heat 2 inches peanut oil with sesame oil added in a deep skillet to 400°F. Fry taro slices until golden brown, turning once. Drain well on a paper towel.
2. Dip slices in desired coating: sesame seed, parmesan cheese or chili powder.

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