

## Malanga Coco (Big Taro)



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#### Description/Taste

Taro is a perennial tropical plant grown for its swollen roots, or corms, and its leafy vegetation. The plant rarely flowers or seeds and relies on the roots for propagation, which may reflect how long the Taro plant has been cultivated by humans. Replanting the upper portion of the root with the stem bud can create a whole new plant. The main root of the Taro plant is referred to as a 'corm,' which grows straight down into the ground and produces smaller "daughter corms" that branch off the main corm. It is similar to a potato in shape and look, with a dark brown flesh and noticeable growth rings. The skin can be smooth or slightly hairy depending on the variety. Its flesh can be stark white, or cream colored with deep purple flecks. The flesh of the Taro root has a texture similar to a water chestnut and its flavor is mild and slightly nutty when cooked. Taro roots contain toxic calcium oxalate, which act like tiny pieces of glass, irritating the mouth and throat. This irritant is removed when the tuber is cooked.

#### Current Facts

Taro root is sometimes referred to as 'the potato of the humid tropics. It is botanically classified as *Colocasia esculenta* with eight recognized varieties including *C. esculenta* var. *antiquorum* and *C. esculenta* var. *esculenta*. *Colocasia esculenta* is the most commonly cultivated variety. The differences in varieties can either depend on the slight variances in the large, elephant ear-like leaves or in the size of the corms, or roots, below. In the Caribbean Taro is called Dasheen, in Egypt it's called Culcas. The Japanese call the root Satoimo, and in Hawaii, where the Taro is revered, it is Kalo. In Africa, where the root is one of the main sources of carbohydrates and therefore energy, Taro is called Cocoyam.

#### Nutritional Value

Taro root has a better nutritional profile than both rice and potatoes, containing high amounts of iron, calcium, potassium, copper, manganese and dietary fiber. Taro root contains very high amounts of vitamin C, which makes the tuber a good source of immune system and antioxidant support.

#### Applications

Taro is a versatile root vegetable, but it cannot be eaten raw and **MUST BE COOKED** to remove the irritating calcium oxalate. In restaurants, Taro root is most commonly used to make chips, as a healthier alternative to a corn or potato chip. Despite the limited use in the United States, Taro has far more uses around the globe. Taro is a common kitchen ingredient in Thailand, Malaysia and India, and has a revered status in Hawaii. To prepare, use gloves to peel the Taro root to protect the hands from any irritants in the tuber. Using a knife, pare away the thick layer of rough skin. Unless making chips, the root must be boiled prior to being used and may require forty-five minutes to an hour. Once the root is cooked it can be mashed or pureed to be added to soups or a batter for Taro cake, even Taro smoothies. The boiled root can also be mashed and mixed with herbs to form vegan Taro burgers. To store, keep the unprepared Taro root in a cool pantry for up to two weeks. When stored in plastic in the refrigerator, it will keep longer.