

# Alocasia or Colocasia?

## *Similarities and Differences*

Commonly called elephants' ears, **Alocasias and Colocasias** are popular for their tropical-looking foliage, broad heart -or arrowhead-shaped leaves, that resemble elephant's ears. The two are closely -related members of the Araceae family.



**Imperial taro Colocasia esculenta var antiquorum 'Illustris'** has smokey to purple/black leaves highlighted with green veining. It likes lots of moisture and is a medium-sized taro, growing 3-4' tall.

**Alocasia or Colocasia?** The look of the foliage reveals the answer. Do the leaves point up or droop down? The **Alocasia** leaves generally point upward or outward and the leaves of **Colocasia** mostly droop but can extend outwards. Where the petiole attaches to the leaf creates this difference in appearance. An **Alocasia** petiole joins the leaf at the base of the 'V,' giving it support. The **Colocasia** petiole attaches to the leaf several inches below the 'V,' letting it droop. The 'V,' called the sinus, is the space between the two leaf lobes.



**Colocasia esculenta ' Coffee Cups' holds its cupped leaves outward. When full of water, they droop to empty and bounce back up. It likes to sit in water, has black stems and grows 3-6' tall**

Both like moist soils but differ in 'how wet.' **Alocasias** like the soil moist but well-drained while **Colocasia** can stand in water and many are aquatic plants. Both can be used in outdoor containers as thriller plants and as accents in perennial gardens always considering their water needs. **Alocasias** appropriately sized for indoors are trending as houseplants. **Colocasia** are also known as taros, the name of its large root tuber. The tuber is really a corm or a swollen stem. It is encircled by striped bands and is edible. The **Alocasia** corm is small and plain. **Alocasias** are considered toxic and should not be eaten.



**A Colocasia petiole attaches to the back of a large leaf several inches below the sinus, the 'V.' An Alocasia stem would join the leaf at the sinus.**

To overwinter, bring both elephant ear types in before the first frost. The corm can dry down in the container or be lifted and dried. Using either method, store in a cool, dry location. Several weeks before the last frost date, replot the corm, water and place in a warm and bright indoor location. When all danger of frost has past and the garden soil and/or water has warmed, it can be moved outside.