

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.