



Invasive Species Management Plans for Florida

Elephant Ear
***Xanthosoma sagittifolium* (L.) Araceae**
Taro, Dasheen
***Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott Araceae**

INTRODUCTION

Central and South Americans use the tubers of elephant ear tubers in various meals. The tuber is one of the most popular foods in the country and provides a basic diet for many. The tubers can be harvested and stored for several weeks if refrigerated. Elephant ear is cultivated in many of the Central and South American countries. Taro is native to Africa and was brought as a food crop for slaves. It is also widely eaten in many areas of the Pacific.

DESCRIPTION

Both elephant ear and taro are herbaceous perennials with large leaves up to 6 feet in length. The common name was given because of its large, elephant ear-like leaves. Taro can be distinguished from elephant ears by the attachment of the leaf from the petiole. In taro, the petiole attaches to the leaf several inches from the base of the 'V' of the leaf, while the petiole is attached directly at the base in elephant ears. The leaves are light green for elephant ear and darker green in color for taro. Both have arrow-shaped leaves with long petioles and wavy margins. Elephant ear plants can grow up to 9 feet in height, while taro is much shorter – rarely reaching 4 feet tall. Leaves are produced from corms which are underground bulblike structures. Rhizomes give rise to offshoots that extend from the corm.

IMPACTS

Both species are found in swamps and along stream banks. The large leaves may shade and prevent regeneration of desired species. Taro is more wide spread and can frequently be observed along the shorelines of many central Florida lakes.

MANAGEMENT

Preventative: The first step in preventative control of elephant ear and taro is to limit planting and removal of existing plants within the landscape.

Cultural: Plant native or non-invasive alternatives.

Mechanical: Dig out corms from the soil. Take care when cutting, as the leaves contain oxalic acid, which may cause irritation to exposed skin.

Biological: Elephant ear has no known biological control agents.

Chemical: Chemicals with known control are limited. Repeated applications of glyphosate (2% solution) with a surfactant may be effective, especially if coupled with other management strategies.

REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS:

Floridata Homepage: <http://www.floridata.com>

University of Florida Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants:
<http://aquat1.ifas.ufl.edu/welcome.html>

University of Florida's Cooperative Extension Electronic Data Information Source:
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/index.html>

Langeland, K.A. and K. Craddock Burks. 1998. Identification and Biology of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. IFAS Publication SP 257. University of Florida, Gainesville. 165 pp.

The Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group. Weeds Gone Wild: Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/index.htm>

Pacific Island Ecosystems at Risk (PIER). Plant Threats to Pacific Ecosystems:
<http://www.hear.org/pier/threats.htm>

Invasive Plants of the Eastern United States: <http://www.invasive.org>
USDA, NRCS. 2004. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.5 (<http://plants.usda.gov>).
National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA

Mature Plant

- Both species are herbaceous perennials, arising from large corms (tubers)
- Also form rhizomes – offshoots from the corms



Leaves

- Leaves arrow-shaped with long petioles and wavy margins
- Taro – petiole attaches several inches from 'V'
 - Dark green, 4 feet tall
- Elephant ear – petiole attaches at the 'V'
 - Light green, 9 feet tall

