



Florida Department of Environmental Protection

# WEED ALERT

## Wild taro

(*Colocasia esculenta*)

**Wild taro** - This native of India and southeastern Asia was brought from Africa to the Americas as a food crop for slaves. By 1910, it was introduced into Florida and other southeastern states by the U.S.



*Wild taro along a Florida waterway*



Department of Agriculture as a possible

substitute crop for potatoes. Wild taro has escaped cultivation and forms dense stands that displace native shoreline vegetation in Florida's streams, rivers, marshy lakeshores, canals, and ditches. Often shoreline wild taro stands break loose and form floating islands that block navigational access and increase flooding potential in canals.

Wild taro may be confused with other plants in Florida that have large arrowhead-shaped leaf blades, such as the non-native elephant ear (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*) and the native arums (*Peltandra* spp.). Only taro has leaf stalks attached to the back of the leaf blade.



*Above: Close up of arrowhead shaped leaf along with yellow bract*

### Why wild taro must be managed:

Wild taro populations have changed the ecology of a large portion of shorelines along the St. Johns River and its tributaries by crowding out native plants that are important sources of food for wildlife. Biologists have reported that wild taro infestations are spreading in Florida's waterbodies increasing from 32% to 62% in public lakes and river since 1983. Wild taro populations are difficult to control in Florida and quickly resprout after herbicide application or hand-pulling if the entire rhizome is not killed or removed.

***Wild taro tubers contain oxalic acid crystals, giving it an acrid taste and causing irritation unless prepared properly. The plant must be handled with care, for all parts contain the irritant.***

# Wild taro

## *Colocasia esculenta*

Synonymy: *Colocasia antiquorum* var. *esculenta*, *Caladium esculentum*

Wild taro has spread to various shorelines throughout Florida and is considered an agricultural weed in Puerto Rico and Jamaica. It is dispersed primarily by purposeful or accidental movement of vegetative fragments.



**Leaves:** Leaf blades to 60 cm (24 in) long and 50 cm (20 in) wide, arrowhead shaped, with upper surface dark green velvety and water repellant; leaves peltate (stalked from back of blade); petioles large, succulent, often purplish near top.



**Flowers:** Inflorescence on a fleshy stalk shorter than leaf petioles, with part of the fleshy stalk enveloped by a long yellow bract (spathe). Flowers tiny, densely crowded on upper part of the fleshy stalk, with female flowers below and male flowers above.



**Fruits:** Fruit a small berry, in clusters on the fleshy stalk.

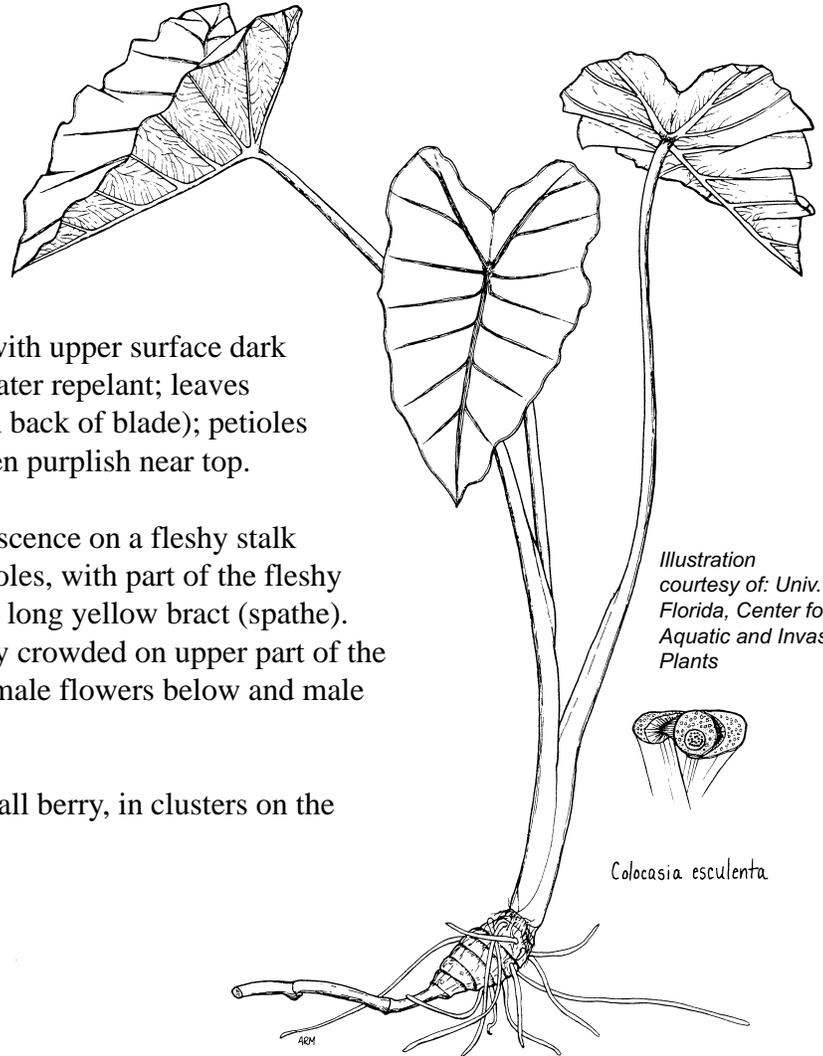
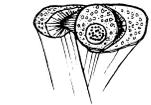


Illustration courtesy of: Univ. of Florida, Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants



*Colocasia esculenta*

### LOOK FOR FIRST:

- large arrowhead shaped-leaves
- leaf blades dark green above, with velvety sheen
- leaf stalks (petioles) from back of blades
- yellow spathe

**Distribution** - Now found escaped throughout the tropics and much of the subtropics including Florida.

