



# Elephant Ears

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Elephant Ear plants are a big, leafy member of the Caladium family. We're talkin' big leaves, as big as an elephant's ear. And, the colorful leaves have a shape resembling an elephant's ear, too. Homeowners are fascinated by this big-leaved plant that grows three to five feet tall. Originating in tropical and sub-tropical areas, they love sunshine, heat, and high humidity. They are easy to grow and will grow in sun or shade. Note: this plant can be poisonous to children and pets.

**Propagation:** Elephant Ears are grown from tuberous bulbs. After the plants have died back in the fall, dig up bulbs. Clean and store them in a cool, dark area until planting the following spring. In southern areas, they can remain in the ground over winter. Add a heavy layer of mulch to protect the bulbs from freezing.

**How to Grow Elephant Ears:** Bulbs should be planted in the spring. Find a sunny location, as these plants like hot sun and humidity. Elephant ears prefer a rich, organic soil. They are moisture lovers, but the soil needs to drain well.

Note: Plants can be invasive. You may want to install a border edging 3"-6" deep into the soil around the plants.

Mix in plenty of compost and organic matter. Apply a nitrogen rich fertilizer once a month for optimum growth. Keep soil moist all season long and mulch around them heavily. In the fall, dig up the bulbs for storage. The bulbs will survive over wintering outdoors only in the warmest areas of the country.

**Insects and Disease:** Occasional problems with burrowing insects can occur. Use insecticides or organic repellents as needed.

There are two genus's of plants known as elephant's ear, *Alocasia* and *Colocasia*. *Alocasia* is the taro that is grown in standing water all over the Pacific as a food plant and of which many new cultivars are popular ornamentals for ponds and bogs. Many have dark purple or almost black leaves, it is native to Asia and Polynesia. *Colocasia* is the genus of the Giant elephants' ear and 'African mask' grown as a house plant. It is native to Central and South America. *Colocasia* will rot in water. *Alocasia* will grow in moist soil as well as standing water, so it does not matter too much which you have. Just keep it very moist, but not in standing water in case it is *Colocasia*.

If you're going to plant it outdoors, wait until all threats of frost are gone. Otherwise, you can give it a jump-start indoors by starting it in a pot. You need a large pot at least 18 inches across and deep. Add a good potting soil and some soil polymers, which help retain water and keep the bulb hydrated. Elephant ears are heavy feeders, so add a handful of an all-purpose 10-10-10 fertilizer and mix it into the soil before planting the bulb. Plant the bulb, with the point up, to a depth two times the height of the bulb.

Give the bulb a good drink of water and then don't water at all until you see sprouts. Then keep the soil relatively moist. Remember, it's a tropical and a heavy feeder. So once it starts sprouting, feed it every couple of weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer that is diluted to half strength. In no time, this pot will grow big ears.