PLANT FACT SHEET

Cyrtosperma merkusii (Hassk.) Schott.

GENUS *Cyrtosperma* **FAMILY** Araceae

COMMON NAMES Swamp taro

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Corms, Root, Leaves, Vegetable

The corms are peeled and boiled or roasted. They are also used to make flour.
Leaves and young flowers can be eaten.
The tubers are ofte boiled then mashed and left to ferment before cooking again.

DESCRIPTION

A large perennial taro family plant up to 2-3 m high, with the pointy ends to the leaf lobes. The leaves are very large, upright and with points on the bottom lobes. The leaf stalks are up to 2.5 m long and 10 cm across. The leaves are 1.5 m long. Other aspects of the plant can vary such as kinds which are more spiny on the leaf stalks than others. The plants can grow up to 4 metres tall. Under the ground there is a large fattened rhizome or corm. This is shaped liked a cylinder and can be up to 70 kg in size. The plant produces a large purple lily type flower which then produces a group of seeds which are orange in colour. The plant produces suckers. The number of suckers varies with varieties.

HABITAT

It is a tropical plant and grows from 18°N to 20°S. It grows in fresh or brackish swamps up to 150 m altitude. Water 0.6-0.9 m deep and rich in humus is the environment used. It can stand shade. It can withstand flooding. It occurs in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Philippines as well as in other countries. It is found in valleys in central and southern parts of the Philippines. It is grown in Visayas and Camarines. In Papua New Guinea it becomes important in Bougainville. It grows in fresh or brackish swamps up to 150 m altitude. It occurs on atoll islands. It has reasonable salt tolerance (2%).

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are normally put in swamps or ditches. Parts of the main corm, or suckers can be used for planting. It can be intercropped with Colocasia taro. A spacing of 1.2 x 1.2 m is suitable. It normally receives little management. It is known to respond to organic matter.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Yields of 10-15 tons/year/ha have been recorded. It takes 2-6 years to mature. Tubers become more fibrous with time so that 2 years is a suitable harvesting time. Individual corms can weigh 2-50 kg.

Planting instructions

Swamp taro

Scientific name: Cyrtosperma merkusii

The plant:

This taro family plant can be picked out from other commonly grown taro plants by the pointy ends to the leaf lobes. The leaves are arrow shaped and point upwards. But other aspects of the plant can vary. Some kinds are more spiny on the leaf stalks than others.

The plants can grow up to 4 metres tall. Under the ground there is a large fattened rhizome or corm. This is shaped liked a cylinder and can be up to 70 kg in size.

The plant produces a lily type flower which then produces a group of seeds which are orange in colour.

The plant produces suckers. The number of suckers varies with varieties. Some countries have up to 15 varieties of this taro.

Naming of the plant.

In the past scientists have often called this plant Cyrtosperma chamissonis and sometimes Cyrtosperma edule but these names have now been changed to Cyrtosperma merkusii. This type of confusion sometimes occurs when a plant varies as much as this one and scientists think the one in another country is a different plant. A scientist who worked in Papua New Guinea took 3 years to sort out the correct naming of these group of plants.

In Micronesia there are 64 different kinds or varieties of swamp taro.

Where does the plant occur.

As a food plant in Papua New Guinea this swamp taro is mainly grown and eaten on Manus island, The Trobriands, the Mortlock Islands and in some areas of Bougainville and Buka Island.

In Kiribati, a Pacific Island nation, this plant has been one of their main traditional foods. It was grown in pits dug into the coral atolls. It is also grown and used in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines as well as some other Pacific Island countries.

NOTES

There are 11-12 Cyrtosperma species.

PICTURES



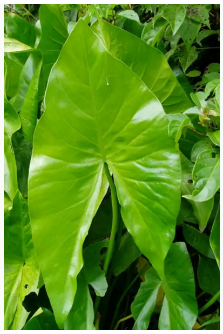
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