

Elephant's Ear

GENERAL

Origin	: sub-tropical, tropical
Vigour	: fairly fast growing
Humidity	: very humid, extremely humid
Propagation	: division, cuttings
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: vulnerable
Dessication	: vulnerable
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: high
Salinity/ppm	: low (1000 ppm)
Hardiness	: +6°C

SHAPE

Type	: perennial
Height	: 3 m-4.5 m
Spread	: 2 m-4 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: pale yellow
Size	: 23 cm
Period	: January - May

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: berry
Fruit size	: 1 cm
Toxicity	: edible when processed

This bold, evergreen perennial is native to the rainforests of southeast Asia and northeast Australia. Accordingly, it demands high moisture and good humus. It will survive in protected, shaded gardens in Arriyadh, where air humidity is relatively high. The soil should not be alkaline and salt tolerance is low. It grows to more than 4 metres in height and almost as wide. Alocasia will take shade beneath mature trees or in a courtyard. It copes with wet soil, but it is vulnerable to stagnant water and needs to be protected from the wind, which may twist its huge leaves. They easily reach 1.5 to 2 metres in length on a stalk of 1 metre, and make this plant deserve its name Elephant's Ear. A variegated cultivar is sometimes available, but is highly susceptible to intensive sunlight and smaller in size. Its leaves are mottled with cream and white. Pale yellow flowers appear on mature plants, spreading a sweet scent and develop into red berries of about 1 cm in diameter. Its seed may be used to propagate, along with dividing the rhizomes and stem cuttings in spring. It also does well in containers and thrives in swamps. Frost kills the leaves, but plants recover from the rootstock. They cease growth beneath 10°C. If its requirements are met, a huge specimen makes a tropical feature of up to 4 metres height. All parts are poisonous if untreated. The sap of cut stems and rhizomes may cause skin irritation, but may be used as an antidote to treat skin that has been irritated by nettle or sugar cane.

