

Vascular Plants of Williamson County

Colocasia esculenta – ELEPHANT'S EAR, WILD TARO [Araceae]

Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott, ELEPHANT'S EAR, WILD TARO. Perennial herb, clonal and colonial, corm-bearing and stolon-bearing, fibrous-rooted from corm, erect-rosetted, suberect to erect, in range to 160 cm tall; shoots with only ascending basal leaves on long, thick petioles eccentrically set inward from the base of the blade (peltate) 25–75 mm, glabrous; corm (enlarged, tuberlike stem) partially or fully submersed rooted in mud, in range often spheroidal with the new corm stacked above corm of previous year or years of different sizes, on robust plant new corm to 100+ × 100 mm, brown with firm, starchy white flesh (ground parenchyma), on outside with horizontal, encircling white rings = leaf scars, mostly 360°, having ± evenly spaced adventitious roots or white “buds” of emerging roots (nodal roots) and with 1 low conic, white axillary bud just above scar midpoint, old leaf bases covering corm; stolons submersed, horizontal and ± straight with long internodes, to 15 mm diameter, white, forming a corm only at tip and nodal adventitious roots. **Stem (aerial):** absent. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, long-petiolate with sheathing petiole base, without stipules; petiole at base with encircling, winglike margins and deeply channeled, to 70 mm diameter, mostly green or purplish approaching blade, above wings ± cylindrical changing to upper portion ± hemi-cylindric, as long as leaf and attached ⊥ to blade, tissue firm to spongy (dependent on level of hydration), having an elaborate set of tubes (water conduits); blade arrow-shaped with backward-pointed, rounded basal lobes, in range to 600+ × 420+ mm, increasing from the first leaf to younger leaves, < petiole, entire and wavy on margins, approaching tip ± 90° but with a solid, acuminate-conic tip 2.5–3.5 mm long (mucronate), with 3 massive, major veins from petiole (to tip and each basal lobe), appearing pinnately veined from major veins (parallel primary lateral veins), having principal veins strongly raised on lower surface, upper surface dull, dimpled above petiole attachment, lower surface minutely papillate and with purplish minor veins (netted secondary lateral veins). **Inflorescence:** not observed in range, spike (spadix), axillary and erect, spadix 90+ mm long, having many flowers formed in a helically alternate series producing pistillate flowers on the basal portion and staminate flowers covering the upper portion with a set of sterile flowers between, spadix surrounded by and fused along rachis to a leafy, sheathing bract (spathe) 200+ mm long having a green lower portion and orange blade.

A. C. Gibson