



By Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

Taro is the potato of the humid tropics. Like the Irish potato we know and love, taro is a tuber, a staple starchy vegetable, and a key ingredient in many traditional dishes.

If you are new to taro, you should know its family secret. Like all members of the Arum family, taro contains crystalline needles of calcium oxalate. These are the poison-tipped darts of the plant world. Cooking is the only way of dissolving the crystals and making the tuber edible. Unlike the potato, taro cannot be eaten raw.

Taro is commonly found in two forms:

- Taro corm or tuber is about the size of a large sweet potato, weighing in at 1/2 to 2 pounds, some as large as several pounds. These are barrel-shaped roots with brown, shaggy skin encircled by distinctive rings. Look for firm skin with no spots, cuts, or nicks. Best ways to cook taro corms is to steam, boil, fry, stir-fry, or added in chunks to stews or soups.
- Smaller corm or cormel, also called eddo in Japan, grows attached to the taro corm. Cormels weigh just 2 to 6 ounces each, with brown, smooth, moist skin, and sometimes have a pinkish tip or bud. Favored in Japan and China, this kind of taro is usually steamed or boiled whole.

The flesh of both kinds of taro is white with pink-purple flecks. Cooking causes a complete transformation: the color becomes creamy, the purple flecks disappear, and the once-poisonous tuber becomes a sweet, nutty flavored vegetable. Taro corms have a dry, starchy texture while cormels are moist and waxy. Both have a short shelf life and are damaged by refrigeration. Best stored at room temperature and used within 2 weeks.

Polynesian poi is a sticky paste made with fermented taro, eaten with fingers or as small balls—a must for every Hawaiian luau!

RECIPE for health

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featured food:

TARO

Taro Frittelle

By Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski, Residential Dining Services

Makes 10 to 12 frittlers, serves 4 to 6

- 1 large (1 to 1 1/2 pounds) taro corm
- 1 large carrot
- 3 eggs
- 1/2 c. crushed Rice Chex cereal
- 1/4 c. rice flour
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 T. minced fresh ginger
- 1/4 c. thin sliced green onion
- 1/4 t. Chinese 5 spice
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 T. canola oil
- 2 lemons, cut into wedges

Peel the taro corm with a vegetable peeler and cut into large chunks; place in a bowl of water while you are preparing the other vegetables. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Blanch the taro for 9-10 minutes. Quickly move taro chunks from the pot to shock in a bowl of ice water.

After taro is cold, remove from ice water, pat dry, and shred on the large holes of a box grater. Also shred carrot at this time. Measure 1 1/2 cups shredded taro and 1/2 cup shredded carrot into a large bowl. Add eggs, crushed Rice Chex, rice flour, garlic, ginger, green onion, spice, salt, and pepper. Mix and set aside.

Heat 2 Tablespoons of the oil in a large nonstick sauté pan over medium high heat. Test for seasoning by placing a small amount of the mix in hot oil, cook, cool, and taste. Adjust seasoning in the mix with salt and pepper as needed.

Add remaining oil to the pan, heat over medium heat until shimmering. Drop 1/4 cup size portions of the mixture into the pan (you should be able to fit 4 frittlers in the pan at a time). Cook for 4 minutes or until nicely browned, then flip and cook an additional 4 minutes.

Serve with a squeeze of lemon on top and garnish with lemon wedge.

- Join us in person at Brody Square Demo Kitchen. Sign-up at health4u@msu.edu.
- Watch online: alumni.msu.edu/livestream.