

Awesome Aroids

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Aroid is the common name for the Araceae family of plants that includes: Alocasias, Anthuriums, Arisaemas, Caladiums, Colocasias, Philodendrons, Scindapsus, Symplocarpus foetidus and Syngoniums. They are easy to care for, thrive in our warm climate, and they tolerate very low light levels. These same characteristics make them excellent choices for house plants, such as Spathiphyllum (Peace Lily) or Philodendron oxycardium (Heart-Leaf Philodendron).

In the outdoor garden, aroids are used as ground covers or specimen plants, where their distinctive foliage adds a touch of tropical jungle. Their leaf blades range in size from several feet wide on the Anthurium salviniae to as small as a coin on the Pothos. Leaf blades may be lobed or divided, and in some specimens, as Monstera, appear with Swiss cheese-like holes. Leaf texture also varies, from leather-like to velvety, to silky, while color ranges from cream to yellow, green and silver, combinations of yellows and greens, purple to purplish black, as well as red, pink and gray.

Despite the diverse characteristics of these plants, all aroids have a flower stalk, the spadix, which is surrounded by a protective leaf called a spathe. This construction characterizes the entire aroid family of plants, from the most primitive anthuriums, with their suggestive projection, to the most ecologically advanced philodendrons. To grow aroids, provide good drainage, water regularly and allow for good air circulation to prevent fungus and bacteria that grow in their requisite shady, humid areas.

Choose Anthurium hookeri for a jungle-like specimen plant in partial shade, perhaps beneath a tree. Their enormous wrinkly leaves have a cardboard-like texture. Use them to create drama in an otherwise boring space. For shaded areas, plant the arrowhead-shaped Philodendron williamsi, whose large, green, three-foot-long leaves have undulating margins and reddish veins at maturity. And for a sophisticated look, opt for Philodendron x magnificum with its dark green and grayish-white veins.

For groundcovers, try groupings of aroids, such as Philodendron 'Burle Marxii,' a tough, low-growing clumper with elongated, medium green leaves, or the more common Philodendron selloum, or its hybrid Philodendron 'Hope.' Both feature deeply lobed leaves and undulating margins. To cover a large area, use Philodendron speciosum or Philodendron selloum.

Aroids add color without flowers. The Philodendron 'Red Congo' is a medium to large philodendron with thick, glossy leaves. New foliage opens red and matures to a dark green with a hint of red; leaf petioles remain bright red. Philodendron 'Black Cardinal' has deep burgundy, heart-shaped leaves, prominent petioles and red stems. New growth is orange, deepening to dark burgundy at maturity. And the Philodendron 'Prince of Orange' begins with a bright shiny orange color, darkening from orange to green as it matures; leaves are elliptical to oblong in shape. It does well in low light, and maintains its orange color in all levels of light.