



Covering The Landscape

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Size Matters

The look of the tropics is hot among plant fanciers, and growing genuinely tropical plants in temperate environments has become the “in” thing for gardeners. Along these same lines, big plants are, well, big, too. One plant genus that practically oozes tropicality is the genus *Alocasia*, and one specific member of that genus towers above nearly all others. *Alocasia macrorrhizos* ‘Borneo Giant’ is the plant to choose if a truly bold tropical landscape statement is your objective.

Shields Of Green

One look at a ‘Borneo Giant’ and you will know that this is the plant to place as a focal point in your landscape. The huge green leaves are held pointing majestically upward, unlike the leaves of colocasia or xanthosoma plants. Surprisingly, the huge size of these plants does not take years to achieve. A positively stunning specimen can be grown in a single summer season with proper care.

This alocasia is sometimes confused with another species that, believe it or not, is reputed to grow even larger still. That plant is *A. robusta*, but in every way that the ‘Borneo Giant’ is easy to grow, the ‘Robusta’ is difficult. The ‘Robusta’ holds the title for the largest undivided leaf in the world, but so far this has been achieved only in its native habitat of Borneo. By contrast, you can grow a ‘Borneo Giant’ to a very impressive size in the landscape without extraordinary care.

Feed Me

‘Borneo Giant’ is a heavy feeder, so a good fertilization program is essential for maximum growth. A quality timed-release fertilizer for season-long feeding, with a quick-release fertilizer charge added at planting time, should get the ‘Borneo Giant’ off to a strong start. Be sure to follow label recommendations for best results. Soil should be well draining yet, kept moist, and with plenty of organic matter content such as composted leaves, pine bark, and/or



This jolly-green giant stands tall in tropical landscapes.

A good fertilization program is essential for ‘Borneo Giant’s’ maximum growth potential.

Stallings

#34

4/c

For Details Circle No. 34 on Postcard

Landscape by Syl-
via
#13
b/w

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Robrick
#26
b/w

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Palm Beach FNGLA
#21
b/w

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manure mixed in. This is especially important if your soil is nutrient-poor, as is often the case in homeowner situations.

The 'Borneo Giant' grows well in full sun or part shade, and does best when watered deeply and regularly. A mulching around the base will help keep moisture in and soil temperatures moderate. When placing your 'Borneo Giant,' check to see that you do not place aggressively growing plants nearby, as they will compete for the available nutrients and slow the growth of your 'Borneo Giant.'

Weather Or Not

For those who wish to try growing the 'Borneo Giant' in a temperate climate, you should plant in spring after all danger of frost has past. As the weather warms, the plant will grow more rapidly and you will have a 'Giant' by mid- to late-summer, even if you start with a plant only a few feet tall. Your challenge will be in the fall when frost is imminent, as your now huge plant will need to be taken out of the ground and prepared for the winter layover. In Zones 8 or 9, you can leave the plant in the ground, but you will need to mulch it heavily. If a trunk has begun forming already, you will need to heap soil over it to cover it, then mulch heavily over that to keep away any possibility of freezing. In colder zones, you will need to dig the entire plant up, allow it to dry out to the point where all the leaves have dried, and keep the heavy stem in a frost-free, dry place until spring. If you have a place to keep the plant growing in the winter, such as a greenhouse or sunroom, you can pot your 'Borneo Giant' in a large container with well drained soil mix and keep it active until spring. That way, you'll have a head start on the growing season.

These plants are largely free from pests, although you should watch for aphids, and especially spider mites if the weather is hot and dry. ■

LariAnn Garner is the founder and research director at Aroidia Research in Florida City, FL.

For more information on this plant and other alocasias for the landscape, visit www.roidiaresearch.org.

Quality by Design
#25
4/c