

Chapter 43.

Tropical Root Crop Production in Florida

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INTRODUCTION

There are four main tropical root crops produced in Florida. These are: cassava, tannia, taro and boniato. The following table lists the botanical families, scientific names and both English and Spanish common names for these crops.

English Common Name	Family	Scientific name	Spanish Common Name(s)
Cassava	Euphorbiaceae	<i>Manihot esculenta</i> Crantz	Yuca
Taro, eddoe, dasheen	Araceae (Aroid)	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L.) Schott	Malanga isleña or malanga
Tannia or tanier	Araceae (Aroid)	- <i>Xanthosoma sagittifolium</i> (L.) Schott	Malanga or yautía
Tropical Sweetpotato	Convolvulaceae	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i> (L.) Lam.	Boniato or batatas or camote

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF TROPICAL ROOT CROPS

Cassava - a short-lived perennial tropical shrub growing 3 to 12 ft. tall (Fig. 43-1). Adventitious roots arise from stem cuttings. They vary in shape from long and slender to globose and enlarge during the starch storage process. Stems are woody and variously branched. Simple leaves, generally dark green, have palmate lobes.

Taro - produces an enlarged edible corm. Its leaves are peltate and when viewed from the abaxial surface resemble a heart with a heavily pigmented spot at the point where the petiole is attached to its adaxial surface (Fig. 43-2).

Tannia - produces an enlarged corm that may or may not be edible. Underground club-shaped cormels are produced during later growth stages (Fig. 43-3). Leaves have long petioles and broad sagittate lamina (Fig. 43-4).

Tropical sweetpotato - resembles other sweetpotatoes grown in the United States, but the skin ranges in color from light pink to a deep wine red and the flesh is white and starchier than yellow- or orange-fleshed cultivars.

VARIETIES

Cassava - varieties are often separated based of their cyanogenic glucoside (HCN) content into either low HCN, a.k.a. "sweet," or high HCN, a.k.a. "bitter," types. The term "bitter" comes from a bitter flavor that is commonly believed to accompany the HCN. No named varieties are currently known in southern Florida. 'Senorita' was locally popular in the 1980s and attempts were made to introduce the CIAT variety 'Mantiqueira' at that same time because it was able to produce acceptable yields even with high levels of rootknot nematode. The range of local genotypes covers a few unnamed clones that have been imported from various Caribbean basin countries. Federal regulations prohibit further importation of cuttings or botanical seed.

Taro - 'Malanga Isleña,' produces one large white-fleshed central corm; a few unnamed Polynesian types are grown for the Asian market.

Tannia - 'South Dade White,' producing white-fleshed cormels; 'Malanga Amarilla,' producing a yellow-fleshed edible corm; and 'Vinola,' producing purple-fleshed cormels.

Tropical sweetpotato - 'Picadito' is the main variety grown in Miami-Dade County. It has deeply lobed leaves and wine colored flesh (Fig. 43-5).

PLANTING AND SEEDING

Cassava - In Miami-Dade County, theoretically it can be planted year round (Table 1.). Normally, the planting is done in the early spring due to slow early growth and sus-

Table 1. Planting information for cassava.

Planting dates	
Miami-Dade Florida	Year-round (mainly February to April)
Planting information	
Distance between rows (in)	48
Distance between plants (in)	24
Planting depth (in)	3 - 4
Propagules needed per acre	5,445
Days to harvest from planting	270 - 360
Plant populations (acre)	5,445

Table 2. Planting information for tannia and taro.

Planting dates	
Miami-Dade Florida	Year-round (mainly February to October)
Planting information	
Distance between rows (in)	48
Distance between plants (in)	24
Planting depth (in)	3 - 4
Propagules needed per acre	5,445
Days to maturity from transplant	270 - 360
Plant populations (acre)	5,445

ceptibility to frost. Stem cuttings 4–5" long (Fig. 43-6) are selected from the lower mature sections of healthy plants (Fig. 43-7) and planted horizontally 3-6" below the soil surface in shallow Rockdale soils. Cuttings are planted by hand in furrows spaced 48" apart with an in row spacing of 24". Since unrooted cuttings are sensitive to water loss, the field should be irrigated soon after planting.

Taro & Tannia - In Miami-Dade County, both crops can be planted year round. Normally, the colder winter months are avoided due to slow growth and susceptibility to frost. For tannia, the top portion of the mother corm is used for planting, while for taro, the smaller unmarketable side shoots are used. Both are planted by hand in furrows spaced 48" apart with an in row spacing of 24".

Tropical sweetpotato – In Miami-Dade County, this crop can be planted year round, though planting is sometimes delayed if extremely cold weather has been forecast. As with orange- or yellow-fleshed varieties, vine cuttings are used for planting.

FERTILIZER & LIME

Cassava – Apply all P_2O_5 , micronutrients, and 25 to 50% of N and K_2O in a band along the planted row one to two months after planting. Sidedress the remaining N and K_2O by banding them on the side of the bed four months after planting as a layby. Specific fertilizer recommendations for Rockdale soils are not available due to lack of a reliable and readily available soil analysis procedure for this soil type. In general, cassava has a medium requirement for N, P_2O_5 and K_2O . Since the soils in Miami-Dade have a high pH, liming is not needed. There are no remediation materials for the high pH condition, though chelated micronutrients such as Fe, Mg, Mn and Zn can be applied to treat deficiencies.

Taro & Tannia – Apply all P_2O_5 , micronutrients, and 25 to 50% of N and K_2O in a band along the planted row one to two months after planting. Sidedress the remaining N and K_2O by banding them on the side of the bed four months after planting as a layby. Specific fertilizer recommendations Rockdale soils are not available due to lack of

a reliable and readily available soil analysis procedure for this soil type. In general, taro and tannia have medium to high requirements for N, medium to low requirements for P_2O_5 and medium requirements for K_2O .

Tropical sweetpotato – see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

IRRIGATION

Cassava - has relatively low requirements for irrigation. But, during active growth stages it must be irrigated when extended dry spells occur. Water requirements and subsequent irrigation requirements are reduced during the last few weeks of growth. This usually coincides with the dry season when cassava is most likely to be affected by mites, a situation which can be helped by irrigating.

Taro & Tannia - grow best when the soil is maintained moist at all times. Proper water management is essential for optimum corm and cormel sizing. Water requirements and subsequent irrigation requirements may be reduced during the last few weeks of growth.

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CULTURAL PRACTICES

Soil Preparation

Cassava - grows best when the soil is turned 2 to 3 months before planting. Plowing early helps rot plant debris and reduce some nematode and disease problems. Soils in Miami-Dade County (except for marl soils) should be scarified or “rock plowed” prior to planting to improve drainage and increase available soil depth. For cassava, marl soils will always produce the best-shaped and best-looking storage roots. However, these soils are prone to flooding, making them less desirable for cassava production. Plants grown on Rockdale soils must be irrigated during periods of dry weather to avoid reduced yields. Wet weather for extended periods can cause leaching of N and K, requiring the addition of more fertilizer. More frequent applications of smaller amounts of fertilizer per application are suggested for Rockdale soils. In general, fields that have not produced a crop of cassava in the last 2 to 3 years are preferred. Avoid fields that have very high nematode populations.

Taro & Tannier - grow best when the soil is turned 2 to 3 months before planting. Plowing early helps rot plant debris and reduce some nematode and disease problems. Soils in Miami-Dade County (except for marl soils) should be scarified or “rock plowed” prior to planting to improve drainage and increase available soil depth. For tannia, marl

soils will always produce the best-shaped and best-looking cormels. These soils are preferred if supplemental irrigation cannot be supplied. Plants grown on Rockdale soils must be irrigated during periods of dry weather to avoid reduced yields. Wet weather for extended periods can cause leaching of N and K, requiring the addition of more fertilizer. More frequent applications of lesser amounts of fertilizer are suggested for Rockdale soils. In general, fields that have not produced a crop of tannia or taro in the last 2 to 3 years are preferred. Avoid fields that have very high nematode populations.

Tropical sweetpotato - see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Bedding

Cassava, Taro & Tannia – Plants are established in rows on flat land. During the cultivation process, ridges are formed down the rows of plants. Ridges provide a place for storage organ formation, improve drainage and facilitate harvesting.

Tropical sweetpotato – see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Cover Crops

Taro & Tannier – Cover crops are not recommended immediately after tannia and taro production. Cultivation is needed after harvest to prevent feral plant establishment.

Tropical sweetpotato – see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Disease Management

Cassava – There are several virus diseases of cassava. However, none have been reported to occur in the United States. Systemic diseases are also common in cassava. Planting material should pass through a phase of tissue culture and thermo therapy. Cassava bacterial blight and Cercospora leaf spot are known disease problems in the United States. When pathogens are present, yields can be reduced by 50% if healthy, pathogen-free or disease resistant cuttings are not used. This emphasizes the need to select clean, healthy planting material. Since cassava is vegetatively propagated, virus and other systemic diseases can be carried from one planting to another in the plant-

ing material. Effective disease control for cassava is based on prevention. Most of the important diseases are caused by pathogens that can be easily spread by wind, rain and workers or are capable of spreading systemically through the plant. It is usually not possible to restore the health of an affected plant once the disease can be detected. A crop rotation of at least 3 years is an important means of controlling diseases. Chemicals approved for management of cassava diseases are shown in Table 3.

Taro & Tannia – Dasheen mosaic virus (Fig. 43-8) and systemic diseases are common in tannia and taro. Planting material should pass through a phase of tissue culture and thermo therapy. Bacterial leaf blight and root rot are two other maladies affecting tannia. Taro has few known disease problems in the United States. Losses due to these diseases have not been documented, but they can be significant. Since sweetpotatoes are vegetatively propagated, virus and other systemic diseases can be carried from one planting to another in the propagules. Genetic resistance to dasheen mosaic virus and root rot diseases is not well documented. Effective disease control for tannia and taro are based on prevention. Most of the important diseases are caused by root pathogens or are capable of spreading systemically through the plant. It is generally not possible to restore the health of an affected plant once the disease can be detected. Since tannia and taro are vegetatively propagated, pathogens are easily transmitted in the planting stock. A crop rotation of at least 3 years is an important means of controlling diseases. Chemicals approved for management in tannia and taro disease are listed in Table 4.

Tropical sweetpotato – see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Insect Management

Cassava – Whitefly, spider mites, shoot fly and tomato hornworm are occasionally observed. Since there is no documentation of economic loss due to these pests, pesticides (Table 1.) are not normally used. Although mites can cause leaf drop, they are normally not present in significant numbers until the winter months when the plants nearing harvest. Keeping fallowed fields free of feral plants is recommended.

Table 3. Fungicides approved for use on cassava disease management.

Chemical Name	Rate/acre	Minimum Days to Harvest	
Amistar 80 DF	5 oz	0	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Apron XL LS	0.64 oz/cwt.	0	Apply to seed pieces
Headline	12 oz	3	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Maxim 4FS	0.16 oz/cwt.	0	Apply to seed pieces
Quadris F	15.4 oz	0	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Trilogy	2 gal	0	
Ultra Flourish	4 pts	0	

Table 4. Fungicides approved for use on Taro and Tannia disease management.

Chemical Name	Rate/acre	Minimum Days to Harvest	
Amistar 80 DF	5 oz	0	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Apron XL LS	0.64 oz/cwt.	0	Apply to seed pieces
Headline	12 oz	3	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Maxim 4FS	0.16 oz/cwt.	0	Apply to seed pieces
Quadris Flowable	15.4 oz	0	See label for maximum use and restrictions
Ultra Flourish	4 pts	0	

Table 5. Insecticides approved for use on insects management on cassava.

Chemical Name	Rate/acre	Minimum Days to Harvest	Insects	Notes
Actara	1.5 oz	14	aphids, whiteflies	
Admire 2 F	1.65 fl oz/ 1000 row ft	125	aphids, whiteflies	At planting
Aza-Direct	3.5 pts	0	whiteflies, hornworms	
BT (<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i>)	see label	0	tomato hornworm	
Entrust	3 ozs	7	hornworms and other worms	See label
Fulfill	2.75 oz	14	aphids, whitefly suppression	
Neemix 4.5	16 fl oz	0	whiteflies, hornworms	
Oil, insecticidal	1-2 gal/100 gal water	1	mites, whiteflies	
Platinum	8 oz	0	aphids, whiteflies	At planting
Provado 1.6 F	3.5 oz	7	aphids, whiteflies	See label
Soap, insecticidal	1-2 gal/100 gal water	0		
Spintor 2 SC	10 oz	3	hornworms and other worms	
Trilogy	2 gal	0	whiteflies, hornworms	

Table 6. Selected insecticides for use on insects attacking tannia and taro.

Chemical Name	Rate/acre	Days to Harvest	Insects
Actara	1.5 oz	14	leafhoppers
Admire 2 F	10 - 24 oz	125	aphids, leafhoppers, whiteflies
Aza-Direct	10.4 - 42 oz	0	aphids, leafhoppers, whiteflies, thrips, mites, loopers
BT (<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i>)	see label	0	various caterpillars
Fulfill	2.75	14	aphids, whiteflies
Oil, insecticidal	1-2 gal/100 gal water	1	leafminers, mites, whiteflies
Platinum	5 - 8 oz	Apply at planting	aphids, whiteflies, leafhoppers
Provado 1.6 F	3.5 oz	7	aphids, whiteflies, leafhoppers
Rotenox,			
Rotacide (rotenone)	1 gal	0	thrips
Soap, insecticidal	1-2 gal/100 gal water	0	aphids

Taro & Tannia – Diaprepes root weevil is the main pest of tannia. Larval feeding causes physical damage to the cormels, causing them to be placed in a lower grade. Whitefly, thrips, and salt marsh caterpillar are occasionally observed. However, there is no documentation of economic loss due to these pests. Resistance is not known to any of these pests. Keeping fallowed fields free of feral plants is recommended. Table 6 lists chemicals labeled for taro and tannia.

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Nematode Management

Cassava – can be damaged by root-knot nematodes. It may cause stunting and yield loss; root-knot nematodes in the storage roots may cause cracking or internal dark lesions that severely reduce the value of the product. The only step to minimize nematode injury to cassava is to include crop rotation unless nematode-tolerant varieties can be introduced legally.

Taro & Tannia – Taro is frequently damaged by root-knot nematodes. Nematodes may cause stunting and yield loss; root-knot nematodes in the corms may cause cracking

or internal dark lesions that severely reduce the value of the product. Several steps to minimize nematode injury to taro include crop rotation and use of nematode-free propagules.

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Weed Management

Cassava – is long-season crop. Control of weeds during production can be difficult. Early season competition of weeds is extremely critical and a major emphasis on control should be made during this period. Growers must plan a total program that integrates mechanical and cultural methods of weed control with the use of herbicides. At the present time, there are no preemergence residual herbicides for cassava. Cultivation is an effective way to manage weeds early in the season. Hilling blades can uproot many annual weeds that have emerged since the last cultivation. Roundup® may be applied as directed spray between the rows using a shielded applicator. Contact with the plants will cause significant yield reduction.

Glyphosate (Roundup®), 0.5 to 1.0 lb a.i. as a shielded directed spray between the rows. Labeled crop: cassava. Apply as directed for “Cropping Systems” under conditions described on label. Does not provide residual weed control.

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Glyphosate (Roundup®), 0.5 to 1.0 lb a.i. as a shielded directed spray between the rows. Labeled crop: tannia and taro. Apply as directed for “Cropping Systems” under conditions described on label. Does not provide residual weed control.

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Harvesting / Packing

Cassava – Unlike most vegetable crops, cassava does not have a definite stage where it is classified as mature since plants will continue to grow as long as there are

green leaves. The crop should be harvested nine to 12 months after planting when it has produced the highest percentage of edible storage roots of the desired size (Fig. 43-9). The crop should be harvested before or soon after killing frosts. Critical temperatures for root damage in the field are not known. Care should be taken to avoid skinning roots during the harvesting process (Fig. 43-10). Once harvested, the roots are very perishable. Waxing of the roots is a common practice to improve shelf life.

Taro & Tannia – Unlike most vegetable crops, taro (Fig. 43-11) and tannia (Fig. 43-12) do not have a definite stage where they are classified as mature since plants will continue to grow as long as there are green leaves. The crop should be harvested when it has produced the highest percentage of edible portion (cormels or corms) of the desired size. Tannia and taro should be harvested before killing frosts. Critical temperatures for corm and cormel damage in the field are not known.

Tropical sweetpotato — see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Crop Rotation

Cassava, Taro & Tannia – There are usually not as many root-knot nematodes where the preceding crop was a grass or small grain. Most vegetable crops are among the worst crops to precede cassava, from the standpoint of building up hazardous nematode populations. Sweet corn may be the best rotation crop of the vegetables. Do not plant any of these crops in the same field in successive years.

Tropical sweetpotato — see Chapter 40, Sweetpotato Production in Florida.

Flood Tolerance

Cassava – plants may tolerate a few days of mild flooding. However, storage root quality is significantly reduced and planting material may be lost if flooding is severe.

Taro & Tannia – Taro (malanga isleña) is more flood tolerant than tannia. The variety grown in Miami-Dade does not tolerate continuous flooding. Tannia plants will tolerate a few days of flooding. However, cormel quality is significantly reduced, due to wart like growths that form on the cormels.

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Other Information

Cassava – HCN: Fresh roots and leaves are toxic due to the presence of free and bound HCN. The total HCN content varies considerably with variety, environment and plant age. Levels in the peel, peeled root and leaves ranged from 5 to 77, 1 to 40 and 0.3 to 29 mg/100 g (fresh wt.),

respectively. Cooking the leaves or roots and changing the cooking water are methods for reducing HCN concentrations. Roots should always be peeled prior to cooling. Toxicity from cassava may develop when considerable quantities are consumed over a period of time. This is particularly true if the prepared cassava has high HCN concentrations and the diet is poorly balanced nutritionally.

Taro & Tannia – Nematode-free planting material: Do not take nematodes or other soil borne problems to the field by planting contaminated plants. If plants must be propagated from suspect soil, use cleaned cuttings to avoid carrying potential problems into the field.