

## *Syngonium podophyllum* H.W. Schott

## Syngonium

(*Arum auritum*, *Pothos auritus*, *Nepthytis triphylla*, *Syngonium affine*, *Syngonium amazonicum*, *Syngonium decipiens*, *Syngonium gracile*, *Syngonium poeppigii*, *Syngonium riedelianum*, *Syngonium ruizii*, *Syngonium ternatum*, *Syngonium vellozianum*, *Syngonium willdenowii*, *Syngonium xanthophilum*, *Xanthosoma gracile*)

**Other Common Names:** African Evergreen, American Evergreen, Arrowhead Plant, Arrowhead Vine, Goosefoot, Nepthytis.

**Family:** Araceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** This species is subtropical to tropical; plants are shoot hardy outdoors only in USDA zones 10(9b)-13, but can be used as a root hardy herbaceous perennial in warmer protected portions of zone 9.

**Foliage:** Alternate, evergreen, simple to palmately compound lobed leaves are prominently featured; leaves are initially cordate to hastate, becoming more palmate in appearance on mature plants; some mature leaves almost look like two palmate divisions of a pinnately compound leaf, leaves are highly variable in morphology; bases are cordate to hastate on juvenile leaves; margins are entire with acute to acuminate tips; the glabrous blades are green, often with suffusely mottled variegation on cultivated selections; variegation is in innumerable shades of green, and often white, cream, or less frequently pink to copper colors; veins are palmate with the central vein dominant on juvenile leaves giving a pinnate appearance to the overall venation; veins are often reddish in color and somewhat impressed above; veins are united into a rim shortly inside the margin; juvenile leaves are smaller, typically 4" to 6" long, and simple or three-lobed, whereas mature leaves can be up to 14" long and possessing five to eleven pinnate or palmate lobes; petioles increase from about 4" in juvenile plants to as much as 24" in mature plants; foliage is generally dense and attractive; variegation patterns are more likely to be present on juvenile leaves and may or may not be stable on mature foliage.

**Flower:** Tiny greenish white monoecious flowers are produced on a short stout axillary spadix with male flower above and female flowers on the basal portion; a 4" to 5" long greenish white to creamy white Aladin's lamp-shaped to boat-shaped spathe surrounds the spadix, noticeable but not overly ornamental when produced.

**Fruit:** Fruit are very seldom formed in cultivation, at least in our region, and consist of an elongated spindle shaped berry with a long arching peduncle; the peduncle is moderately stout increasing in thickness until it splays to form the top of the berry; fruit start out a dark rich green color and the berry ripens to a bright red with a papery brownish sheath while the peduncle remains a dark green then senesces; fruit are 2" to 3" long suspended from a similar length peduncle; seeds are brown to black at maturity.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — the stout dark green stems may become splotch with light tan as they age, sheaths are present at the base of the leaves; green to tan aerial rootlets may emerge at the nodes after a time; stems contain a milky sap; Buds — buds are small and essentially encased in the stem if they do not elongate shortly after formation; Bark — trunks remain a smooth dark green or splotched color for an extended time; old 2" to 3" diameter trunks have been reported to become woody.

**Habit:** *Syngonium podophyllum* begins as small herbaceous mounds 12" to 18" tall which slowly develop sprawling, pendent or climbing branches to an indeterminate length; vine lengths to a 100' have been reported in the tropics; plants can form groundcovers or climb via the development of wire-like aerial rootlets; the overall texture is medium-coarse to coarse, but pleasantly so; stems sometimes root at the nodes when in contact with soil.

**Cultural Requirements:** Culture of this species is easy, accounting in no small part for its popularity in tropical landscapes and elsewhere as a container or interiorscape plant; regular fertilization improves growth in both interior and exterior environments; soils or substrates should be well drained but maintained with a steady supply of moisture; drought and salinity tolerances are low; best growth is in acidic to neutral soils or organic substrates; if acclimated and adequate moisture is available, plants will tolerate partial sun to moderate shade; periodic removal of senescent foliage is needed in interiorscape environments, but is not often required outdoors; although often slow growing indoors, *S. podophyllum* is a very rapid grower in the tropics.

**Pathological Problems:** Under low humidity or drought stress, the margins of the foliage become necrotic; relatively few serious insect or disease problems occur, occasionally bacterial leaf spot, soft rot, aphids, mealybugs, scale, and spidermites are problems, mostly in greenhouse or interiorscape settings.

**Ornamental Assets:** Evergreen or variegated foliage of varied morphologies is the primary asset of this species; where they form, flowers and fruit can add some interest but these rarely occur in our region.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Cold hardiness is the primary limitation and a propensity to become weedy or invasive in tropical locations is the major liability.

**Landscape Utilization:** Mostly encountered in interiorscapes or as a hanging basket plant in our region, but *S. podophyllum* can be used outdoors in highly protected spots along the Gulf Coast and in deep South Texas; in the tropics it is sometimes planted as a groundcover, but works best as a climbing vine; it is sometimes grown on short vertical logs or old palm trunks in pots for use on patios or in conservatories.

**Other Comments:** Plants are reported to be poisonous if ingested; the genus name refers to the fused ovaries in the berry and comes from the Greek words for together, "syn", and womb, "gone"; the specific epithet means thickly stalked leaves.

**Native Habitat:** Native to Central America and South America; it is extensively cultivated and occasionally escaped elsewhere in subtropical and tropical locations; this species is classified as an invasive plant in Florida.

**Related Taxa:** According to GRIN, the genus *Syngonium* H.W. Schott contains only four species from the tropical Americas of which *S. podophyllum* is the primary species in cultivation; several named cultivars with differing leaf shapes and variegation patterns are available; some cultivars and several provenances have been treated at the variety, subspecies, or species level by various authorities, most of which are considered to be synonymous with one of these four species; this likely explains the incongruence that some authorities list more than 30 species in the genus while others merely list four; 'White Butterfly' which offers beautiful suffuse white splotched variegation on the upper leaf surfaces is probably the most commonly available cultivar.

**References:** Dehgan, 1998; Greig, 2004; Llamas, 2003; Lob and Carpenter, 1992; Riffle, 1998; Rogers, 2012; Watkins and Sheehan, 1975; Whistler, 2000.