

Zamioculcas zamiifolia
More than just a Lunar New Year festive plant

Green Culture Singapore Feature Article for January 2009

Published on 28 January 2009

• Text by Wilson Wong •

• Pictures by from Wilson Wong & Tan Eng Ong •



Above: Pots and pots of *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* are available for sale during the Lunar New Year.

Zamioculcas zamiifolia was introduced to Singapore a few years ago as Chinese New Year festive plant. As with all Chinese New Year festive plants, *Z. zamiifolia* was not spared from being given an ambiguous, auspicious-sounding Chinese name called the “金钱树” (jin qian shu). It translates roughly into “gold coin plant” with reference to its succulent, glossy leaves that are arranged neatly on opposite sides of a long petiole. With a little imagination, one can relate its look to a string of Chinese coins that were used in ancient China.

The most common English name it is known here these days is "ZZ plant" which was probably derived from the first two letters of its botanical name. *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* is the only species belonging to the genus *Zamioculcas*. The specific epithet "*zamiifolia*" reflects the appearance of the plant's foliage with plants belonging to the unrelated cycad genus *Zamia*.

It is a tropical perennial plant that originated from eastern Africa. *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* is a member of the arum family, Araceae. This may come as a surprise to people who are unfamiliar with it because of its distinct appearance with other indoor aroids that have leaves that are peltate- and cordate-shaped.



Left: *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* has attractive, glossy leaves that are arranged in two ranks along each petiole.

This plant's classification in the Araceae family becomes obvious when it flowers. The flowers of *Z. zamiifolia* are characterized by a green spathe that covers around a small bright yellow to brown or bronze upright spadix. Flowers are produced periodically by mature plants near the leaf bases and base of the soil. Superstitious gardeners may regard the flowering of their *Z. zamiifolia* as a sign of good fortune and luck.

Zamioculcas zamiifolia is grown as an ornamental plant, mainly for its attractive glossy foliage. It is evergreen in the tropics and constitutes one of the worthy buys in the category of festive decorative plants because it does not die away and had to be discarded like those that originated from temperate or subtropical climates that are imported prior the festive season.



This aroid is also a hardy plant which is highly suitable for growing in harsh conditions encountered in high-rise apartments and other indoor areas such as offices and lift lobbies. It tolerates low humidity, strong wind, low light and also drought resistant. With these virtues in mind, *Z. zamiifolia* is an excellent candidate for indoor décor and is a perfect 'cast-iron' plant that is suited for today's busy urbanite who wants to a plant at home or workplace.

As a plant, *Z. zamiifolia* is herbaceous and a slow-grower. It can grow up to a height of about 60 cm tall. New shoots rise from a stout underground, succulent rhizome. Beneath the soil level, *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* produces large round-shaped rhizomes that help to store water and food. Shoots are spaced very close together and a tight clump is formed. The tough, dark-green, shiny leaflets are highly attractive and roughly oval in shape with a pointed tip.



Left: *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* has underground storage organs that helps it survive periods of drought and lack of light.

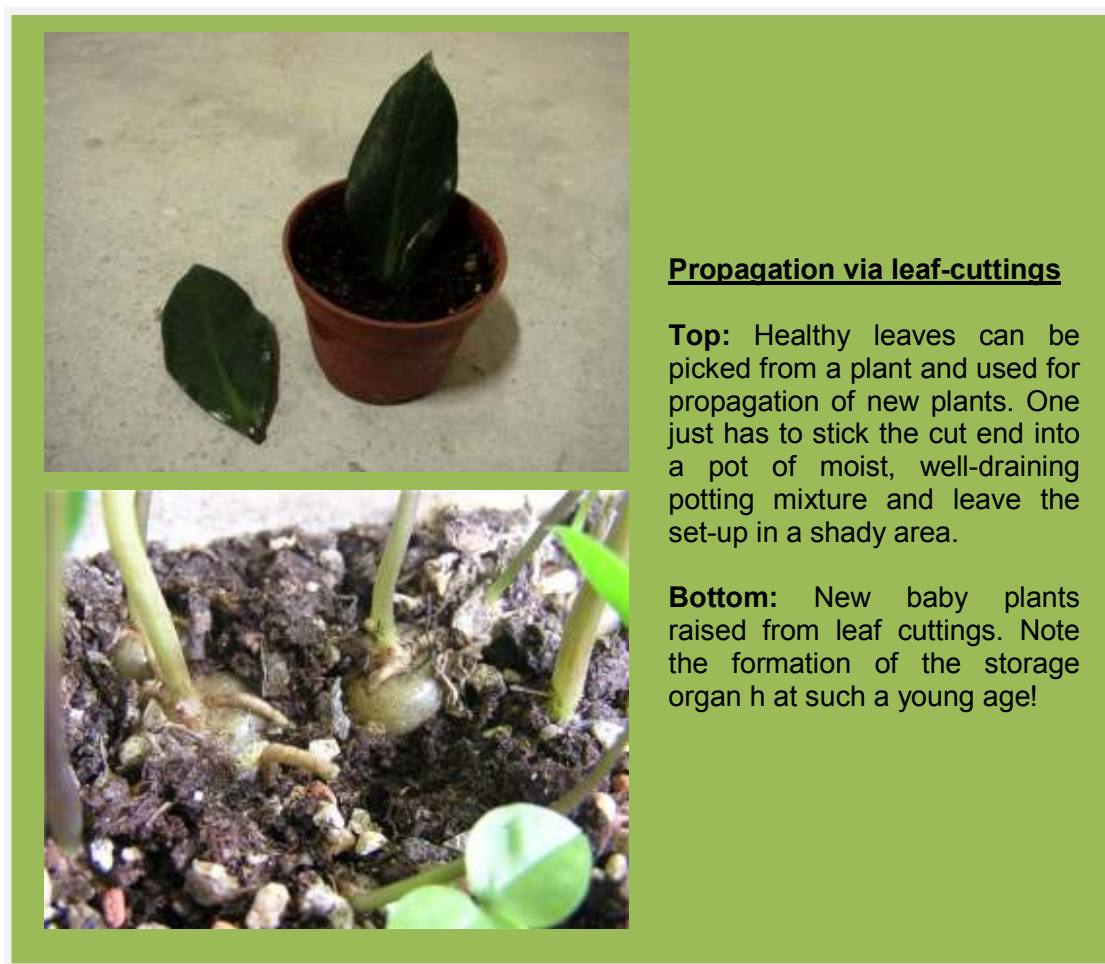
Mature specimens of *Z. zamiifolia* make very good accent plants and single plants can be grown inside a tall container or several plants can be put into a long planter box. Note that mature plants tend to have a wide spread and should be given sufficient space for the leaf stalks to spread out.

Finally, similar to other aroids, take note that all parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested as they contain raphides and/or druses of calcium oxalate.

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As mentioned before, *Z. zamiifolia* is a very hardy plant. It can tolerate being grown in a dimly lit area for a long time. However, when grown under low light conditions for prolonged periods, its growth literally stops with the absence of new growth. Plants in general fare better and grow more vigorously when they are given some bright, indirect sunshine or filtered morning sunshine for at least 4 to 6 hours daily. Rotate the pot from time to time, so that a plant with a symmetrical growth habit can be ensured. Avoid growing *Z. zamiifolia* under direct sunshine as leaves will bleach.

Plants can be grown in a variety of soil types but a well-drained, friable mixture is usually preferred. *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* is well known to be able to withstand short periods of drought but regular watering will keep the growing medium moist at all times which is a basic necessity to have a healthy plant.



Slow-release fertiliser pellets can be used at a rate and quantity recommended by the manufacturer are usually sufficient to meet the nutrient needs of a plant grown under most circumstances. Plants may also be fed with water-soluble chemical fertilisers that has been diluted to quarter strength once a month.

Plants are rarely bothered by pests and diseases. Scales, a common indoor plant pest may occasionally find its way on your *Z. zamiifolia*. Decline and death of plants brought about via the rotting of the plant's crown and roots can be prevented if plants are kept on the drier side and avoid growing a plant in soggy soil conditions.

Zamioculcas zamiifolia can be propagated by means of leaf cuttings where one can detach a couple of healthy leaves and allow the cut ends to dry before sticking them via the lower end into a tray of new potting mixture. Leaf-cuttings and the medium should be kept moist at all times and placed in a bright area. The set-up can be enclosed in a polythene bag to conserve moisture and reduce moisture loss. New plantlets take a considerable amount of time to emerge and the original leaves used for propagation may die away at first. Succulent bulb-like structures should form beneath the soil and new plants that emerge eventually can be potted up individually.

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