

Hydnophytum formicarum

The Ant Plant

The ant plant *Hydnophytum formicarum* is a unique plant that has a tuber-like lower stem with chambers formed within which attract ants to colonize the structure. In this symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship, ants get a multiplex while the ant plants, in return, get big brother protection from herbivores, as well as nutrients from ant debris.

These are epiphytic shrubs, which grow perched on trees in rainforest and mangrove. *H. formicarum* has multiple stems with small leaves atop its globular, smooth tuber. Native to Singapore.

Plants start producing holes in their tubers when a few months old. Care should be taken to make sure they get enough bright light as otherwise they elongate and go out of their desirable fat shape. Low light conditions will also encourage more leaf growth at the expense of a fatter tuber.

Grow ant plants in a very open, well-drained mix of bark pieces plus a little chopped coconut husk in pots. More mature plants prefer less potting mix, which dries out faster between waterings, and they show it by producing profuse, healthy root growth.

Being epiphytic, ant plants are quite succulent and can tolerate dryness well. Like cactus, too wet for too long and they will rot away.