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Plant named in honour of the king

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Alocasia farisii, a newly discovered rare aroid or keladi species named in honour of Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V, has a high ornamental value.

Botanist Zulhazman Hamzah of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, who discovered the species, said the plant is highly valued because it is aesthetically pleasing.

He said the value has been bumped a notch higher as the plant also unlocks the biogeographical link between the peninsula and Borneo.

"This is indeed a very special species because while similar plants are found in Borneo, this is the first time we discovered the species of its kind in the peninsula.

"And I named it after our Tuanku Sultan, in appreciation of His Majesty's enthusiasm in conserving habitat where rare and endemic species are found," he said.

Zulhazman said the university has yet to tap the other benefits of this newly-found species.

"Currently, we are carrying out research to see if it contains potential allergens that could affect people," he said.

He noted that the colour of the plant varied slightly when grown in a controlled environment compared with those in the wild.

"This plant can grow quite fast too. Within three months, its height can reach half a metre," he said.

Zulhazman first found the rare keladi plant growing in the limestone enclave of Gunung Stong in Kuala Krai in 2012.

It was acknowledged as a new species on April 26 last year after it was proven that its morphology was different from any other recorded plants worldwide.

Zulhazman, together with Norzielawati Salleh of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and Peter C. Boyce, an expert in ecology, botany and systematics from German, submitted their joint research findings to the *Nordic Journal of Botany*.



Alocasia farisii ... the newly discovered and unique aroid (keladi) species named after Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V whose birth name is Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra.

Alocasia farisii is so far only found in the karst limestone areas of Jentian in Tanah Merah near Gua Musang and Gua Ikan-Gua Pagar in Kuala Krai, all located in north-east Peninsular Malaysia.

"It grows as a lithophyte in soil and humus pockets on limestone outcrops and boulders, rather occasionally as terrestrial on seasonally dry lightly forested karst formations," said Zulhazman.

Other than *Alocasia farisii*, Zulhazman also discovered two other new keladi species – *Homalomena kualakohensis* in 2011 and *Homalomena stongensis* the year after.

The names of both plants were derived from the locations where they were found – Kuala Koh and Gunung Stong.

"But for the most special new plant that I discovered, I named it in honour of our sultan. This is because Tuanku is special in stature and character," said Zulhazman.