

Collectors willing to pay thousands for rare daun keladi

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KOTA KINABALU: For most people, it's just a wild plant near their backyard drain.

But for the keen collector, certain species of daun keladi can fetch up to thousands of ringgit.

Nursery owner Melissa Loh said she could sell up to RM3,500 per pot for rare ones.

She said the RM3,500 *Alocasia machortizza* variegated plant was much sought after.

"Collectors and plant enthusiasts love the leaf designs.

"The rarer it is, the more difficult to cultivate and propagate, the pricier it will be," she said.

Loh, 35, said there were "trends" in the public demand for plants.

"We can never predict or understand why a certain plant can be so expensive at certain times, but that's the way it is," she said, referring to

why daun keladi was now the "in" thing.

In fact, there was a heated debate online recently between sellers and netizens over the price of daun keladi.

The "fans" vouched about its value, but others dismissed it by saying the plant could be seen everywhere in their village backyard.

Dr Rhema Maripa, who is a senior lecturer in ecophysiology at Universiti Malaysia Sabah, said the pricing of these plants would seem to be worth it for the collectors.

Although these species may look alike to the untrained eye, she said the specific plant identification (ID) actually varies.

"This is what makes the price differ.

"So it is up to the person to know whether he is overpaying or not," she said.

A plant expert, who declined to be named, said the price of these plants,

scientifically known as *caladium*, would vary depending on where they are found.

"For those easily found, of course they are cheaper.

"But for a specific ID which is hard to find or rarely seen in Sabah, it would definitely be costlier," the expert said.

He said the hype among planters who were willing to spend hundreds and even thousands of ringgit just for a plant solely depends on the person's interest.

"It also depends on the marketing strategy of the seller," he said.

For the newbie gardeners, he advised them to at least equip themselves with some knowledge of the plants they want to get to avoid being cheated.

The expert said species like the *Caladium bicolor* were not so rare or exotic but they would still "definitely not just be lying around in drains".



Moneymaker: Loh (second from right) and her nursery staff posing with the huge rare plant which she sells for RM3,500 per pot.