

# Hold your nose and head for the hills: Titania is opening

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Standing more than 5' tall on July 30, the corpse flower Titania is expected to unfurl its putrid blooms on Monday August 6 or shortly thereafter at the UC Botanical Garden's Tropical House. (UC Botanical Garden photos)

Get a whiff of this: Titania, UC Botanical Garden's corpse flower, is being pollinated today. The plant's skirt of petals now measures 44" in diameter. Visitors to the garden's Tropical House will be treated to a

stunning display and the plant's knockout, repulsive stench.

When UC Botanical Garden's rare titan arum, *Amorphophallus titanum* (corpse flower), blooms this week, the flower will both attract and repel visitors. When the plant opens to a diameter of three to four feet, titan arum looks visually arresting, but it's best known for a characteristic that can only be experienced firsthand after it blooms: its distinctive odor.

"It really does smell like there's a dead body in the room," says Garden Director Paul Licht, recalling his experience with Trudy, another corpse flower that blossomed in the garden's Tropical House in July 2005. The odor helps the plant attract insects that carry its pollen to other titan arums, since corpse flowers can't pollinate themselves.

Titan arum specimens are rare enough to be named like pets. Garden staff call their soon-to-bloom plant Titania after the Queen of the Fairies in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer's Night Dream."

Titania was raised from seed in the garden starting in 1995. Not until July 19 did Licht and his staff know their plant would be one of the rare titan arums that actually flowers. On that day, Titania measured 36  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". By Monday morning, July 30, her spadex — the protuberance at the flower's center — had hit the 61" mark. The plant can grow up to 6" a day, notes Licht.

Before blooming, titan arum looks like a rounded column with a green pleated skirt of leaves wrapped around it. When the plant's "skirt" takes on a purple tinge, it will likely bloom two days later. (On Monday of this week, Licht thought it likely that Titania would bloom within two or three days.) And that's when the corpse odor kicks in, lasting for about 12 hours.

Visitors can enter UC Botanical Garden daily until 5 p.m., and viewing is

permitted until 6 p.m. During the week, visitors are encouraged to take the campus shuttle, which leaves every half hour from Hearst Mining Circle, since parking is very limited.

The garden is publishing an [online photo diary](#) that includes the latest images of Titania.

Source: UC Berkeley, by Wendy Edelstein

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