

Botanical Garden braces for blooming corpse plant

June 21 2010



June 21: Tip with spathe at 33.5in. Image: The University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley

The University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley, nestled in Strawberry Canyon just above the central campus, features a mind-boggling 12,000 kinds of plants and breathtaking views of the Bay Area. The term breathtaking soon will describe the rotten flesh-like stench of the garden's about-to-blossom Titan Arum, also known as the corpse plant.

This will be the sixth Titan Arum flower to fascinate visitors to the

garden's Tropical House since 2005. But the still rare event, a plant world equivalent of a gasp-inducing car wreck, always draws crowds.

"I've been watching this plant for the past week, but just got the final confirmation that it will be a bloom," Paul Licht, director of the UC Botanical Garden and a professor emeritus of integrative biology, said Wednesday. "We expect it to start growing quite quickly now, and it can easily grow up four inches a day."

This particular corpse plant has grown four inches, to about 25 inches, since Sunday and is expected to continue at a rapid pace until it reaches an exceptionally stinky and spectacular crescendo - in the form of a bright green and deep maroon flower - probably around July 1. The powerful odor is at its peak for about 24 hours and attracts insects to pollinate it. Then the stink can come and go for several days.

The [Botanical Garden](#) is using its [website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter](#) to update the stinky plant's progress and to solicit suggestions for names until early Monday (June 21). The winner will receive a young *Amorphophallus titanum* plant, a family membership or a one-year extension of a current membership. The garden's previous blooms included Trudy (2005), Titania (2007), Odora and Odorado (2008) and Tiny (2009).

This Titan Arum is from the garden's original collection that arrived from Sumatra as seeds 15 years ago, and its brothers and sisters are on display alongside it at the garden.

"We will have 'babies' for sale from our earlier bloom by Titania for anyone wanting to impress their neighbors," said Licht. "The titans make nice house plants, except perhaps during the one night they bloom."

The garden is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, and is closed the first

Tuesday of each month. When the latest bloom occurs, the garden will be opening after hours to members, and memberships will be sold at the gate.

The Titan Arum, or *Amorphophallus titanum*, is the largest flowering structure in the plant world. Discovered in Sumatra in 1878 by Italian botanist Odoardo Boccari, the plant's swollen underground stem - or corm - needs to weigh around 30 pounds or more before blooming. That typically takes at least seven years, but it can obviously take longer.

The flowering structure is not really a single flower, but a stalk of tiny male and female flowers that are kept from sight at the base of the central phallus-like structure called the spadix, which heats up to human body temperature. It is surrounded by a pleated skirt-like covering, the spathe, which is bright green on the outside and deep maroon inside when it opens. The flower bud is open for a day or two before it starts to collapse.

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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