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## ***AMORPHOPHALLUS TITANUM* Blooms at the U.S. Botanic Garden**

Huge, Rare Plant in the Conservatory Now Beginning To Flower

**July 23, 2003 - Washington, DC** - It's finally happened! The titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) at the U.S. Botanic Garden is blooming. This huge plant is native only to the tropical rainforests of Sumatra, Indonesia, and has been exhibited in this country on very rare occasions since the first recorded bloom in the U.S. in 1937. Our specimen has bloomed just one other time since it was received as a small seedling in October 1993 from Maryland arum enthusiasts Craig and Fanny Phillips. The Phillipses had grown the plant from seed collected by California physician James R. Symon, now deceased, who had searched for the plant during several journeys to Sumatra.

The titan arum grows from, and stores energy in, a huge underground stem called a corm. When sufficient energy is accumulated, usually after several years, the plant is ready to flower. The developing inflorescence initially appears as a pale green, bud-shaped structure composed of a spathe that encloses a central spike-like spadix. At first hidden inside the spathe, the gray-brown spadix grows in size, becoming revealed as the entire "bud" swells and with the ultimate height depending on the energy accumulated in the corm. The speed of the development depends on day and night temperatures. When the plant reaches full bloom, the spathe is fully unfurled to reveal a crimson interior. Average recorded height of the entire inflorescence is about 5 feet, and the largest one is said to have been 12 feet tall! At full bloom the inflorescence is well-known for smelling like a large rotting corpse; hence its other common name, the corpse flower. The odor occurs in waves and attracts pollinators, which are carrion feeders in the plant's native Sumatra.

Our plant on display in the Conservatory was brought from the USBG Production Facility greenhouses on the morning of July 14, when it was 36 inches tall. By 3 p.m. on July 17 it measured 44.5 inches, and at 6 a.m. on July 22 it had grown to 55 inches. The bloom began to open at about 3 p.m. on the 22nd, and it is expected to be fully open by the morning of July 23. Once fully open, it may remain in bloom for about 48 hours, and then it will collapse. After that occurs, pollen will be collected and preserved by scientists from the Botany Department of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, our "Botanical Partner on the Mall" with whom the USBG works closely to cosponsor numerous exhibits and programs.

The U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory is open to the public, free of charge, every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is located at 100 Maryland Avenue SW, at the foot of the U.S. Capitol. Visitors are encouraged to take Metrobus or Metrorail. Further information is available by calling 202-225-8333 or visiting our website at [www.usbg.gov](http://www.usbg.gov). Members of the press are permitted to use digital images from the website so long as the USBG is credited.