



Titan Lily—*Amorphophallus titanum* Fact Sheet

This amazing plant was grown by dedicated plant enthusiasts John and Jenny Catlin on the Gold Coast at Jacobs Well. It is believed to be the first plant flowered outside of the tropics in Australia.



When it was discovered in the rainforest of central Sumatra in western Indonesia, by the Italian botanist and explorer Dr. Odoardo Beccari in 1878, the stories caused quite a sensation and disbelief among European botanists. Not until the first specimen flowered in cultivation at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England in 1889 did the world take notice. During the Victorian era plant hunting was at its height and unusual specimens were enjoyed by a discerning and curious audience. It was also an era where governesses protected young women from such an indecent sight. Whenever the *Amorphophallus titanum*, which grows only in western Sumatra, has flowered in cultivation it has attracted an enormous amount of attention.

The sight, growth and odour of this rare botanical wonder are unbelievable. A mature underground corm (tuber) produces a huge aroid bloom (inflorescence) which is usually taller than a man. When it first emerges the spadix is completely enveloped in the spathe and bracts, but as it develops the growth rate of the spadix accelerates rapidly. It is ranked as the largest unbranched inflorescence in the world, which is produced by the largest tuber. A single huge leaf will emerge sometime after the flower resembling a sapling tree. A mature leaf is patterned with irregular pale green blotches and at the apex divides into an umbrella of leaflets up to 49 feet in circumference.

The *A. titanum* is difficult to cultivate - not because, as was also once rumoured, it eats its grower - but because it is prone to rotting, does not reliably increase in size and fails to produce seeds or offsets as easily as other species of *Amorphophallus*. The plants rarely set seeds because the female flowers open first and by the time the male florets are producing pollen they are no longer receptive. Each plant contains both flowers and florets. Even in the wild it is difficult because there must be an another similarly timed pollen producing inflorescence. In addition, flowering can take at any time of the year so chances are stacked against pollination. There was once a rumor that this monstrous inflorescence is pollinated by elephants. Instead pollination is believed to be performed by large carrion beetles lured by the powerful odor of decaying flesh. This overpowering stench is released in waves when the flowers are ready for pollination. Its Indonesian name bunga bangkai means corpse flower.



The specimen in these photos is being grown in a 1000 litre container with the bulb estimated to be around 120kg. I would like to thank local plant enthusiast Graham Fleming for calling in to Midday show on 4GR and supplying these images.

Additional information from

<http://www.virtualherbarium.org/Amorph/amorphophallus-history.html>