



Native to the lowland rainforests of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, this endangered species has only rarely flowered in cultivation in the United States. One of the largest inflorescences in the plant kingdom, it is also one of the most malodorous. The plant was first discovered in Sumatra in 1878 by Italian botanist Odoardo Beccari. He sent seeds to the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew where it first bloomed in 1889. It is in the same plant family as the familiar New England native, Jack-in-the-pulpit.

For many years the plant produces only a single, highly dissected leaf, which can reach up to 12 feet high. During this stage the plant is building up a large underground storage organ, called a corm, which can eventually weigh up to 150 pounds. Once it reaches a critical size, the plant may send up a flowering stalk, usually every three to five years.

These are probably the most spectacular flowers on earth. The inflorescence (flowering stalk) of this species is one of the largest. The size of the corm determines the size of the flower — 100 pound corms have been known to produce flower stalks up to 9 feet tall. The spadix, which holds all the small individual flowers, is yellow in color and is set against the deep, burgundy red of the spathe (the sheath surrounding the spadix). Contributing to this flower's enigmatic and exotic allure is that it is one of the worst smelling flowers you can encounter! The overpowering aroma of rotten flesh lures insects who serve as its pollinators. The spectacular showing is usually short-lived, usually lasting a day or two.

Our plant was raised from seed collected by the late Dr. James Symon, a physician who became one of the world experts on *Amorphophallus*. He collected seed in 1994 in an abandoned rubber plantation in the town of Aekсах, in Sumatra and distributed it to universities and botanical institutions. Many recent flowerings of *Amorphophallus* in captivity trace back to Dr. Symon. In March of 1995 some of this seed was donated to the conservatories at the University of Connecticut. Clinton Morse, the manager of these conservatories, succeeded in germinating and growing this precious seed and in 2002 he donated a corm to the Smith College Botanic Garden.