



## *Amorphophallus titanum* at Volunteer Park Conservatory

*Amorphophallus titanum* was discovered in 1878 by Italian botanist and explorer Odoardo Beccari (1843-1920) in Sumatra, at the height of plant hunting during the Victorian era.

The plant has the largest undivided inflorescence. It was initially imagined that elephants pollinated it but in truth, it is pollinated by dung and carrion beetles that get trapped. There are 450-5000 male florets packed tight to make a 2.5-3 inch cream white ring under the spadix covered by a spathe. Below them, each of the 700 female florets is  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long and when mature produces the famous stink. The female florets from one plant cannot be pollinated by pollen from the same plant, for females and males mature at different times. Within the 40-year lifespan, the plant may bloom only 2-3 times.

Waldo, our flowering *A. titanum*, has come to us on loan for the second time from University of Washington. This plant was grown from seed sown on March 20, 1995. The seed was collected by James Symon and Willbert Hetterscheid in Sumatra, Indonesia in February of the same year. Waldo weighed 80 lbs on June 13, 2005, before blooming the first time at the Conservatory on June 29, 2005.

We are grateful to Doug Ewing, Greenhouse Manager for Department of Biology at University of Washington. He has several Titan arums in his collections, a few of which have flowered, including Husky, which was loaned and flowered at the Conservatory in 2007. Husky and Waldo are actually "twins" having split apart from the single seedling sown in 1995.

### *Stinky Fun Factoids*

- Historically feared to consume the gardener growing the plant
- Initially imagined that elephants pollinated but in truth, it is pollinated by carrion beetles or sweat bees that get trapped.
- *Amorphophallus* means shapeless phallus.
- Average flowering height 6 feet .
- The female florets are what smells when mature.
- The smell can also make eyes water.
- Fruits are rare in the wild.
- Spathe collapses when flowering is completed to keep the fruits dry in the tropical environment.
- The tuber loses weight during flowering (one was recorded to have lost 7 lbs).
- It is the largest unbranched inflorescence in the world.
- Plants tend to occur in clusters in Sumatra but no population study has been done.
- Hornbills have been seen feeding on berries and are a possible seed disperser.
- Security guard in Fairchild Botanical Gardens had to wear a gas mask during flowering.
- Some recorded flowerings:
  - 1889 Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew (UK)
  - 1926 Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew (UK)
  - 1937 New York Botanical Garden (New York, NY)
  - 1996 Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew (UK)
  - 1998 Fairchild Botanical Gardens (Miami, FL)
  - 1999 Huntington Botanical Gardens (San Marino, CA); University of Washington
  - 2002 Virginia Tech University, UC Santa Barbara
  - 2003 US Botanical Gardens (Washington D.C.); Bonn Botanic Garden (Germany); University of California at Davis
  - 2004 University of Connecticut
  - 2005 Fairchild Botanical Gardens (Miami, FL)
  - 2005, 2007, 2008 Volunteer Park Conservatory! (loaned from University of Washington)**