

Skunk Cabbage

(*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

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Skunk Cabbage is a flowering perennial plant that is native to parts of the Midwest and Eastern United States. This species flowers appear before the leaves and have a distinct unpleasant odor. Skunk Cabbage gets its name from this odor.

Skunk Cabbage is remarkable in that it is able to generate heat when the ground is frozen. In fact, it's flowers can warm up to around 70° F. This allows the plant to emerge and bloom when most other spring blooming species are still dormant. After blooming, Skunk Cabbage emits an odor that smells similar rotting meat. The odor travels easily on the warm air that rises from the plant. This attracts pollinators such as butterflies, beetles and bees.

Most animals avoid skunk cabbage because it emits a burning sensation when consumed. However, bears have been known to eat young plants.

Skunk Cabbage Quick Facts:

- Classification: Forb
- Life Cycle: Perennial
- Flower Color: Maroon
- Bloom Time: Late February through May
- Other Traits: Can reach 70° F in below zero conditions



Habitat

Skunk Cabbage grows in woodlands, wetlands and near streams. The plant prefers saturated soils and will die if conditions become too hot or dry.

Determining Age

You can determine the age of Skunk Cabbage by the number of leaves the plant possesses. Young plants have few leaves whereas old plants have many. Some researchers believe that Skunk Cabbage can live for thousands of years under the right conditions!

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