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## **Rare corpse flower is about to bloom at the UCSC arboretum**

July 22, 2022

Visitors to the [UC Santa Cruz Arboretum](#) will have the opportunity to witness one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the plant world when a rare corpse flower opens its enormous, foul-smelling inflorescence sometime in the next few days.

The plant, also known as a titan arum, has been growing for the past decade in the UCSC Greenhouses and is now flowering for the first time. Its inflorescence, which will bear hundreds of small flowers, is already nearly five feet tall and growing several inches every day.



Photo courtesy of the UCSC arboretum.

“We’re getting a lot of people coming to see it already, because it’s magnificent even now while it’s still developing,” said Arboretum Director Martin Quigley. “It won’t be fully open and stinky for a few more days, but we can’t say for sure whether it will be three days or six or eight.”

When it opens, the corpse flower emits an odor like that of rotting flesh, attracting flies and beetles that pollinate the flowers. The flowers are borne on a tall, thick spike called a “spadix” that rises from a large, bowl-shaped bract or “spathe” colored a deep magenta red on the inside. The spadix warms up to 99 °F, which helps to disperse its pungent odor far and wide.

The stinky bloom of the corpse flower lasts for about 24 hours after it opens, and then the whole inflorescence collapses. It usually begins opening in the late afternoon or evening, and the Arboretum will remain open until 11 p.m. on the night that it happens.

The titan arum is endemic to the tropical forests of Sumatra in Indonesia, and the plants are endangered in the wild as a result of deforestation and habitat loss.

“The individual plants are very sparse and widely separated in the forests, so the stench is a mechanism to attract pollinators over long distances,” Quigley said.

The Arboretum’s plant was started from seed at UC Davis and came to UCSC in 2013, where it has been cared for by Jim Velzy and Sylvie Childress, the former and current directors of the UCSC

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greenhouses, who maintained it in a tropical environment in the Langenheim greenhouses. Each year, the plant has grown a single large leaf, storing energy in an underground stem called a corm. The corm has to grow to about 35 pounds before the plant will bloom.

About a week ago, when UCSC's titan arum showed signs that it was getting ready to bloom, it was moved to the Arboretum, where visitors will find it in the patio between the horticulture buildings. Temporary signs direct visitors from the parking lot to the corpse flower.

The entrance to the UCSC Arboretum & Botanic Garden is located on the east side of High Street about 1/2 mile past the main campus entrance (use the address "1 Arboretum Road" for GPS and mobile routing devices). The gardens are open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. More information about visiting the UCSC Arboretum is available online at [arboretum.ucsc.edu/visit](http://arboretum.ucsc.edu/visit).

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