

The Corpse Flower – *Amorphophallus titanum*

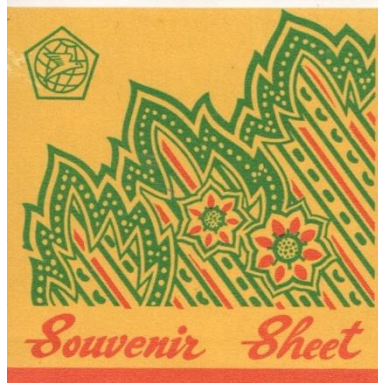
Thomas W. Broadhead – broadhea@utk.edu

On July 21, 2021, a specimen of the Corpse Flower – *Amorphophallus titanum* – unfurled into full bloom (at right unopened and open at far right) at The University of Tennessee. These can take up to 10 years to bloom. This began my botanical and philatelic fascination with this unusual plant. A member of the family Araceae, it is indigenous to rainforests on the Indonesian island of Sumatra but is endangered due to deforestation.

The corpse flower has been celebrated on stamps of Indonesia, showing the unfurled inflorescence, which can reach eight feet in height, although the University of Tennessee bloom was only 3 feet tall. The plant has a complex life cycle, including a vegetative stage that looks like a tree and a reproductive stage shown here. The actual flowers are very small and are located at the base of the erect spadix, surrounded by the large furl of a modified leaf or spathe.



The first stamp to show a corpse flower was issued in 1989 in sheets format and as a souvenir sheet for a celebration of “Flora ’89” (left).



Following that, the stamp showing a single Corpse Flower (right) was issued as part of the 10-stamp flora and fauna series of 1996.



A bloom appears on the 2010 stamp together with a sun bear *Helarctos malaynus malaynus* (a subspecies also indigenous to Sumatra) (right) as part of the sheetlet depicting “Provincial Flora Fauna,” but the plant is typically taller than the bear!

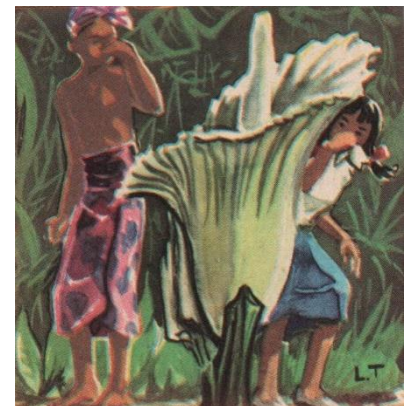


Outside of its natural habitat, the corpse flower has been cultivated in greenhouses around the world since 1880. A bloom is shown on the 2014 stamp of Belgium (below far left) and the 2015 personalized stamp of Japan (below left, which commemorated a bloom event.



Why is this amazing plant called a corpse flower? At the time it blooms, it emits a scent that has been compared to rotting flesh, attracting carrion flies and other like-minded pollinators. Its aroma is aptly depicted on

the early 20th century chocolate insert by Nestlé, where the two children hold their noses from the stench.



[Corpse flowers at U.S. Botanic Garden | United States Botanic Garden \(usbg.gov\)](http://usbg.gov)

[The Corpse Flower: Description, Life Cycle, Facts \(treehugger.com\)](http://treehugger.com)

[Amorphophallus titanum - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amorphophallus_titanum)