



Skunk Cabbage *Symplocarpus foetidus*

Skunk cabbage is one of NJ's earliest spring plants, blooming in February, when snow is still on the ground. It grows in wetlands and on moist hillsides.

It has very large leaves and looks similar to a cabbage you may grow in your garden. Leaves are 16-22 inches long and 12-16 inches wide.

The odor of the plant attracts pollinators, like blowflies and bees.

The flower produces its own heat through its unusual chemistry.

The plant has contractile roots—they pull the stem of the plant deeper into the ground as it grows so that the stem remains under ground.

Skunk cabbage has a medium toxicity to people, but can be ingested with careful preparation. It was used by Native Americans as a medicinal plant and a seasoning. The young leaves, roots and stalks can be boiled and eaten.

Skunk cabbage may be cultivated in water gardens.



Ask A Naturalist

A few neat things about skunk cabbage:

- The heat from the flowers can be 27-63 ° F more than the air temperature!
- It is one of the first foods a black bear will eat when it comes out of its den in the spring.
- It smells like a skunk! Yuck!