

Titan arum is in bloom at the Botanic

The world's biggest and most pungent flower has burst into bloom for the first time in two years in a tropical hothouse at Edinburgh.

The *Amorphophallus titanum* (titan arum) at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), opened into one of the world's biggest and most spectacular blooms after rocketing up to 264.5cm in height.

The rare and endangered plant is known as the "corpse flower" because it emits an eye watering whiff of rotting flesh after flowering to attract pollinating insects.

More than 1400 free tickets to see and smell the rare phenomenon were snapped up within a few hours after officials agreed to allow limited access to the glasshouse, which has been closed for renovations.

Staff at the attraction have dubbed their rare specimen "New Reekie" due to the smell, which has been compared with everything from old bins and rotting fish to sweaty shoes and sewage.

Fiona Inches, RBGE Glasshouse Manager, said: "We are delighted. We measured the plant in the afternoon and by early evening the flower was opening up and the smell was starting to waft out.

"The smell was coming in waves, fluctuating between a really bad camembert cheese and rotting fish. You could smell it far

beyond the Gardens and the surrounding streets.

“What we also noticed was the number of flies. We hadn’t locked down the vents so they were being drawn in from all over and making a beeline for it, then spiralling down into the plant. We’ve never seen so many.”

Native only to the Bukit Barisan range of mountains in West Sumatra, *Amorphophallus titanum* is famed for its size, smell, and the relative rarity of its bloom.

The “dead-meat” stench is caused by a mix of gases emitted by the heating up of parts of the central flower spike at night.

Edinburgh’s famous specimen was a corm the size of an orange when it was given to RBGE in 2003. In 2010 it weighed 153.9kg, making it the largest ever recorded.

It was nurtured in a tropical glasshouse for 12 years before finally flowering for the first time in 2015, in a first for Scotland.

It flowered again in 2017, 2019 and 2022, which researchers thought might be its last smelly bloom.

Ms Inches said: “It’s really exciting. This only happens every two or three years, for a very short period, and it’s very rare to have one flower five times.

“These plants are the biggest blooms in the world so it’s incredible to experience it for real. Tickets were snapped up almost as soon as they were made available.”

The Ancient Greek name *Amorphophallus titanum* literally translates as “giant misshapen penis”. The common name “titan arum” was developed by Sir David Attenborough while filming *The Private Life of Plants*, as the Latin name was thought inappropriate for a BBC audience.



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Thales de Lima – PhD Student

Louise Galloway – Glasshouse Supervisor

Picture Alan Simpson



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Thales de Lima – PhD Student

Louise Galloway – Glasshouse Supervisor

Picture Alan Simpson



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Thales de Lima – PhD Student

Louise Galloway – Glasshouse Supervisor

Picture Alan Simpson



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Thales de Lima – PhD Student

Louise Galloway – Glasshouse Supervisor

Picture Alan Simpson



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Picture Alan Simpson



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Picture Alan Simpson