

Meet the world's biggest bloomers

Only an hour's drive from the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, photographer **Steve Teo** smelled a blooming good story

The *Amorphophallus titanum* is the largest, tallest bloom in the world. In the dense rain-forest of Jambi province, in the south of Indonesia's Sumatra island, this strange flower grows more than a metre wide and up to four metres high.

It blossoms at night. Unlike fragrant flowers, its smell permeates the eerie jungle night like that of rotting meat. So the local people, understandably but a little unkindly, named it *Bunga Bangkai*—corpse flower.

The flower simply shoots out of the damp ground, usually near a stream in the deep undergrowth. It has no stem or leaf, just the crimson sepals and that long, protruding stamen.

Nocturnal insects have only a few hours in which to pay it a visit before it withers in the morning.

There are several differently-coloured species. They bloom around March in the equatorial conditions of intense humidity after the monsoon season.

Should you wish to see *Amorphophallus* in the wild, it will be necessary to follow your nose for several days' trek deep into the jungle of Jambi. Next find your specimen—they are few in number as well as phew by nature. Then wait for an indeterminate



time while it makes up its mind whether to blossom for you.

However, the Botanic Gardens of Bogor, an hour's drive from the national capital of Jakarta, has a specimen of the *Amorphophallus* in an enclosure. No one can forecast when it will bloom, and when it does many admirers flock to see it. To get a picture, one has to queue for hours be-

Amorphophallus titanum: called Bunga Bangkai (corpse flower) due to its smell

cause almost everyone has a camera. It's just as well cameras only capture images and not odour. G

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