

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Skunk Cabbage

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One of the most exciting plants to see and experience in Spring is our featured species today!

Skunk cabbage is a weird plant. It's flowers are odd, it smells bad, and produces its own heat! In Minnesota, this species is usually the first plant blooming in a year, as early as March in some locations. For the Sax-Zim Bog, late-April to early May is prime time to see this plant in bloom.

The flowers of this plant are super interesting! Skunk Cabbage is in the Arum family, with many familiar relatives like Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Cala Lily. The flowers of these plants have different structures than most: the leathery looking "petal" is called the spathe, while the central reproductive structure is called the spadix!

To attract early season pollinators, especially flies, the flowers smell somewhat skunk-like. Pollinators may also be attracted to the plant because it is warm! Yes! This plant is able to produce heat and can be much warmer than the air temperature (up to 20

degrees in fact!). Heat is produced by using oxygen to breakdown starches in the root systems. The produced heat is important to help melt snow around the plant, but also to help waft it's scent.

After the plant has flowered and the air temperatures have stabilized above freezing, the leaves of the plant begin to unfurl. These leaves start small, but may reach three feet in length and up to a foot wide! The bright green clusters of leaves can dot marshes, ephemeral wetlands, and bogs and very much resemble clusters of cabbages! Skunk cabbage can be incredibly common in its preferred habitats.

While these plants haven't yet begun to emerge in our area, we should be able to start finding them along roadsides. McDavitt Road is a great place to find this species, though it is fairly widespread.

More information can be found on the photos below!
(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)



These leathery looking structures are the "flowers" of skunk cabbage! The "flowers" are called spathes. Not only do they look leathery, they feel leathery as well!



Inside the spathe of skunk cabbage is the spadix! The spadix looks a little like a pineapple and contains spikes of stamens and stigmas.



After the flowers have died back, the large leaves of skunk cabbage unfurl and become prominent on the landscape!