



Eastern Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

- The Skunk Cabbage's spiky-shaped maroon leaves are mottled with contrasting patches of bright yellow-green. Can easily spot in the snow.
- Skunk cabbages begin to make its appearance in the early winter, when most plants still wait for spring.
- Take a hike in February through a wetland and you are bound to spot a cone-shaped furl of leaves just waiting to bloom.
- Find this in the wetlands any time of the year either by sight or by smell.
- The smell is beneficial to the plant's survival. It discourages animals from nipping at its leaves and disturbing the soft, muddy wetland habitat it prefers.
- The smell (most often described as rotting flesh) also attracts bees and flies that act as its pollinators by moving pollen from males to the waiting stigmata of females.

A "Warm-blooded" Plant?

- When hiking, you may notice how the ice and snow on the ground around the plant has melted.
- Skunk cabbages are one of the few plants that exhibit thermogenesis, meaning they have the ability to raise their own temperature.
- Much like a warm-blooded mammal, the wildflower can regulate its temperature well above the outside temperature throughout the day and night.
- This attribute also allows the skunk cabbage to melt its way above the frozen ground.

Who eats Skunk Cabbage?

- Most animals avoid skunk cabbage because it causes a burning sensation when eaten, but bears will eat young plants in the spring.
- In the spring, deer eat a lot of skunk cabbage, a plant that contains crystals of a poisonous compound called oxalic acid, specifically, crystals of calcium oxalate. Even a tiny bit of young skunk cabbage can burn your mouth for hours.

More Intriguing Facts about the Skunk Cabbage

- An idea of the age of this plant can be found through its leaves. Young plants have few leaves, while very old plants have many. How old could it possibly be? Some researchers believe that the skunk cabbage **could live for thousands of years**.
- Skunk cabbages prefer moist, wetland soil. If its habitat becomes too hot and dry in the summer, then the wildflower will most likely die.
- The eastern skunk cabbage has contractile roots that allow some mobility. As the roots grow down and contract, the plant is pulled into the earth. As it anchors itself deeper, leaves are forced underground meaning if you really want to know how old it is - start digging!
- The leaves decay in early summer, but unlike other plants that dry up and fall; this plant essentially dissolves into a black, slimy substance that soaks back into the ground. Just another quirk of this unique wetland wildflower.