

Eastern Skunk Cabbage

Symplocarpus foetidus

Plant Type: Native Perennial Wildflower

Sun Exposure: Part Sun, Shade

Season of Interest: Spring, Summer, Fall

Bloom Time: Spring

Bloom Color: Dark red

Height: 24 to 30 in.

Spread: 18 in.

Spacing: 24 in.

Water Needs: High

Maintenance: Very little

Soil Type: Moist, High in organic matter

Soil pH: Acidic (pH < 6.0)

Soil Drainage: Moist/Wet

Pests: None, Rabbit and Deer resistant

Diseases: None

Wildlife: None

Description: Eastern Skunk Cabbage is one of the early harbingers of spring. It grows east of the Mississippi, from New England down to South Carolina. It does this by being one of Tennessee's only thermogenic plants.

In late winter, skunk cabbage "burns" some of its stored carbohydrates to warm the ground around it and melt the ice and snow so that the flower can emerge. The flower consists of a sheath or hood that is dark red and inside is a spadix with the tiny green flowers. It is related to the tropical corpse flower and emits a foul odor like rotting flesh that attracts flies which in turn pollinate the flowers. The flower disappears and the leaves emerge and remain until early fall when the upper part of the plants digests itself by turning into slime and sinking into the ground. However, The leaves are quite attractive during the growing season. They are dark green, oval shaped, quite large extending to 2 feet in length and a foot wide.

Finally there is the plants bizarre root system. The roots appear to be wrinkled and are contractile. This means that as the central taproot grows, it contracts like an accordion and pulls the crown of the plant deeper into the soil. This adaptation is beneficial for wetlands or stream-sides where the plants may be washed away. For more information see: plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/symplocarpus-foetidus

Care and Growing Tips: Plant in partial to full shade in a consistently moist or wet soil. May also be found in shallow standing water, 1 to 2 inches deep. Naturally found in wet deciduous forests, swamps, or shady wetlands.

