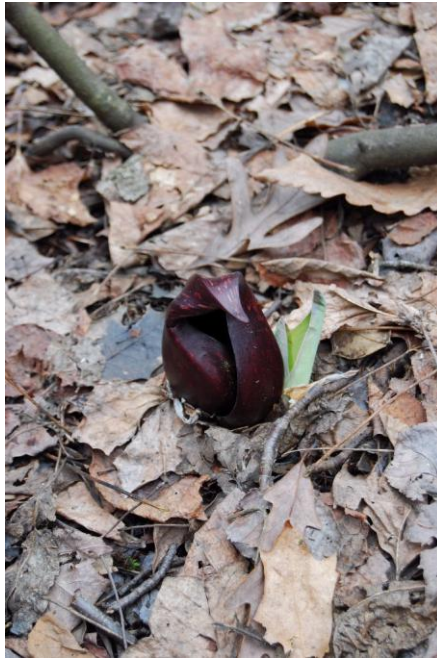


2011 March's Plant of the Month



Skunk Cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*

Botanists throughout the State are anticipating the end of winter and the beginning of the growing season. Now that the snow is all but gone it is not too early to start to cure the effects of "cabin fever" with a day afield. One species guaranteed to be visible is one of the State's earliest flowering plants. Skunk cabbage is a distinctive native herb known by a fetid smell produced when its leaves are crushed. These plants are true obligate freshwater wetland species found on saturated hummocks along stream banks and in the lowest elevations in forested wetlands. It is found in all of New Jersey's 21 counties. It is infrequent or entirely missing from the heart of the Pine Barrens.

Skunk cabbage is a member of the Araceae, the Arum Family. New Jersey's arums include common native herbs such as arrow-arum, jack-in-the-pulpit, calla lily, golden club, and duckweeds. These distinctive monocotyledon plants are identified by characteristic flowers created by simple, modified leaves that are transformed into rudimentary floral displays. The outer floral covering is a bract called a spathe. It's a curled modified leaf that forms an outer covering to the spadix, the seed producing part of the flower.

Skunk cabbage's spathe and spadix are visible throughout the winter and into March. It is a small fleshy cup-like flower that ranges from dark green

with purple spots to solid maroon such as the specimen photographed for this month's plant. Skunk cabbage unrolls its leaves in April when it becomes a wetland forest floor dominant, covering the soil with 1 foot or larger blades.