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Botanical Bulletin Leaflet Series
Published by the University of Oregon Extension Division

The Skunk Cabbage Family

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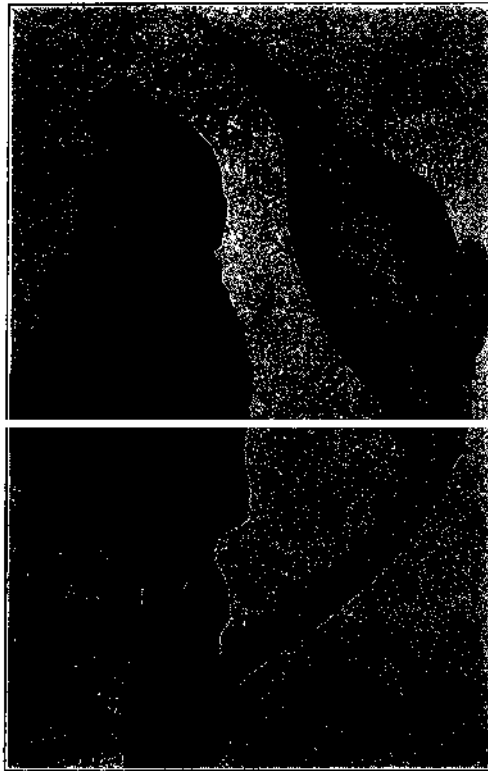
Botanical Bulletin

March 15, 1916

Vol. 1. No. 1

Skunk Cabbage Family (Araceae)

BY ALBERT R. SWEETSER
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SKUNK CABBAGE
(*Lysichiton kamschatcensis*)

THE western skunk is adorned with the scientific name of *Lysichiton kamschatcensis* but even this is not sufficient to hide its penetrating odor, which however is by no means so insistent as that of its eastern sister. In spite of this it is a thing of beauty, at least at sufficient distance, as it clothes our bogs with its big green leaves and flashes back from its golden chalice the gladdening rays of the sun with the message that "Springtime has come." It holds its position by its huge soil-clutching roots, as anyone may prove to his satisfaction by digging one out.

The eastern root has been used to some extent as a medicine.

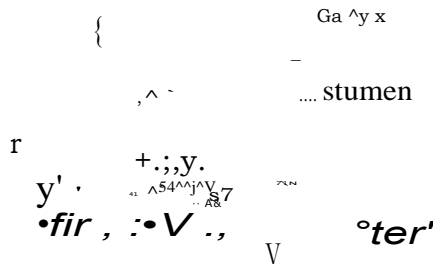
The so-called calla lily, a native of the Cape of Good Hope and cultivated in this country, belongs to this family as does also the interesting Jack in the pulpit, found in our eastern woods.

Detailed Description

The conspicuous yellow portion called spathe (see Fig. 1) is in reality not a part of the flower but simply a leaf, modified in shape for protection and in color as a sign of attraction for the insects. The odor is to ward off undesirable insects and attract others. Within is the stiff straight stalk called the spadix, upon which are arranged the numerous flowers.

Figure 2 is a drawing of a section cut across the spadix, and as the flowers are at right angles with the long axis they will be cut lengthwise. Also a single flower is shown much enlarged and as it would appear if looked down upon. Note that there is but one floral envelope, consisting of four small more or less united green sepals. Opposite each of these is a stamen with its pollen. In the center is the egg-case or pistil, having a pollen-receptive surface or stigma on top and the egg cell or ovary below. Later the yellow spathe will wither, leaving the spadix with berry-like fruit.

5191t flower



Cross Section of spadix, showing ovary and stigma of flowers

FIG. 2

QUERY: Since we have seen that each of the little flowers contains stamens and pistils why does it need insect visitation?

NOTE: The botanical department will gladly name any of the wild flowers or shrubs for those who may desire it. Pick enough of the plant to show the typical characteristics: flower, fruit if present, leaves and in some cases the root. Send by mail to the herbarium of the University of Oregon, Eugene.