

Rare Titan Arum Bloom at NC State University

The blooming of a Titan Arum – colloquially known as the corpse flower, for its foul odor when blooming – is a rare and not-quite-precisely-predictable event, occurring for the plant about once every 12 years and lasting for just hours.

An NC State University horticultural science graduate student had been growing his personal Titan Arum, and the student and Horticultural Science department reached out to CALS Communication a week before the bloom was expected. The department asked CALS Comm to promote the blooming event as well as educate the public and media on the rare flower.

The cramped greenhouse space where the plant was housed didn't allow for large crowds, but the clients wanted to share the unusual event to raise interest in plants and in horticultural science at NC State. To allow for community engagement, a live stream of the plant was to be set up and run continuously from one week prior to bloom to one-week post bloom, broadcasting the whole process to anyone with access to the stream.

The intended audience to reach with our strategy included the following:

- Prospective students
- University colleagues
- Donors
- Horticulture enthusiasts

The audience will be hit through a strategic plan that includes:

- Access to livestream and photos
- Promote the rarity of the bloom
- Educate public on plant as well as the extraordinary work of the Department of Horticultural Sciences

NC State University is located in the urban environment of Raleigh, North Carolina, and the CALS department deals heavily in the agricultural environment. CALS seeks to diversify its base and add students from urban environments as well as rural to fill the numerous opportunities these fields present.

The promotion of the bloom seeks to help strike interest in diverse parties who would normally not seek out this kind of event or information to generate new interest and buzz.

CALS Communication's Chris Liotta (videography and livestream setup), Dee Shore (writing and media relations), Janine Brumfield (planning), Taylor Craig (social media) and Suzanne Stanard (web editing) made up the core promotion team, planning and executing outreach to news media and to the public. In addition, Richard Campbell designed the website, and Ken Ellzey shot follow-up video.

Overall, the Corpse Flower homepage had 37,744 total page views during that two-week period. During that time, it was the single most viewed page, over the department and College home pages. It was caused the single largest spike in college website sessions during the entire year.

In regards to the livestream, there were over 25,000 total views of the stream during the live period, and we had viewers in four foreign countries. Most of the viewing came from embedded sources, so the accessibility of YouTube Live helped tremendously to make our stream available to the public. In total, over 700,000 minutes were watched on our stream through the entirety of this process.

The Horticulture Department estimates that about 5,000 people came from all over North Carolina, and from nearby states, to the greenhouse to see the flower during the 3-day period in which it was actively blooming and at its smelliest. In addition, the event generated a substantial amount of funds for the department in the given timeframe. Through the website portal and on-site donations, Horticultural Science garnered \$1,100. The amount was to be split in half, with one part going to the Horticultural Science Graduate Student Association and the other part to conservatory for updates aimed at enhancing undergraduate students' experiences with the teaching collection.

The CALS Comm team was contacted roughly one week prior to the expected bloom date of the flower so there was a pressing need to get everything together in a timely fashion. With a limited allocated budget of \$300, the team targeted the fastest ways to drum up interest in the bloom. The flower eventually bloomed a few days early, so CALS Comm had kept in touch with outside media and was able to get all interested parties out to the flower in its two-day bloom window.

The flower blooms once every 8 years, roughly so capitalizing on this rare event was a must for the university.