



# HighLights



Trial Gardens and HortResearch at the South Mississippi Branch Experiment Station

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“Spike” the titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) flowered on June 30, 2016, and was visited by 300 guests at the experiment station and by 10,000 viewers via live streaming on the web from the Spike Cam. The spathe began to unfurl just before daybreak, reaching 19½ inches across at its widest point, revealing the dark burgundy color of the spathe’s interior surface. The odor of decaying flesh produced by the plant also began just before daybreak and grew stronger as the day went on, attracting a multitude of blow flies to the plant and drawing visitors to the source of the “pungent” aroma. Upon nightfall, the spathe began to close and the odor began to diminish. A video showing time-lapse photography of Spike on June 29 and 30 may be viewed at: <http://extension.msstate.edu/spikecam>.



The white specks on the tip of Spike’s spadix (above) are eggs laid by blow flies. The flies were attracted by the strong odor emanating from the titan arum and were fooled into thinking they had located a dead animal.



A cross-section (above) shows the semi-hollow structure of Spike’s spadix. The interior tissues of the spadix had the consistency of thick, fibrous cotton candy. Tissues from Spike’s inflorescence are being used by researchers to study the genetics and chemistry of the titan arum.



A bird’s-eye view (above) shows the dark burgundy color of the interior surface of Spike’s spathe. Look closely and you may also see flies circling for a landing. Out of view are the many male and female flowers at the base of the spadix and surrounded by the spathe.



Following removal of the spathe, the dense ring of male flowers (yellow; in photo at right) can be seen situated above hundreds of individual female flowers around the base of the spadix.

