Amorphophallus bulbifer (W. Roxburgh) C.L. von Blume

(Arum bulbiferum, Conophallus bulbifer, Pythonium bulbiferum)

- This seasonally dormant herbaceous perennial member of the family Araceae goes dormant predominantly due to cold in our region, but often enters dormancy in response to drought in its native environments in India, Burma and Southern Asia; established plants are hardy in USDA hardiness zones 8 (7b) to 13 and can reach 3’ to 4’ (6’) tall with a similar spread; this species is sometimes known as Amorphophallus or Devil’s-Tongue, but these names may also be applied to other members of the genus.

- A thick cylindrical dark green petiole with creamy splotches arises from an underground corm to unfurl into a successively three-lobed thick leathery dark green leaf forming a flattened umbrella-shaped canopy; individual lobes are more or less ovate with acuminate tips and impressed pinnate veins which curve and connect to form a rim inside the margins of the lobe; thickened portions of the main veins are also splotched in appearance; small bumpy brown bulb-like corms from which new plants can be propagated develop on the axis of main veins atop the leaves; the specific epithet means bulb-like in reference to these structures; an erect spadix within a cylindrical spathe is produced on mature plants; the spathe is creamy white to pinkish white inside with grey or brownish speckles on the exterior; receptive female flowers have a mildly unpleasant fermented scent; plants are grown as a textural accent and conversation piece for shady understory settings.

- Moderate to filtered shade is generally required in our region and plants are more successful in moister portions of the region; well drained alkaline soils are best, but this species can tolerate various pH soils as long as adequate moisture and shade are available.

- The genus Amorphophallus C.L. von Blume ex J. Decaisne, sometimes included in the genus Arum L., consists of about 180 species of seasonally dormant or evergreen herbaceous perennials or shrubs; most species originate in Southeast Asia, the western Pacific Islands, or from Africa; most members of the genus arise from corms; although several species are sometimes offered in specialty nurseries in the U.S. only A. bulbifer is widely planted; the genus name derives from the ancient Greek words for deformed, amorphos, and penis, phallus, in reference to the shape of the below ground portions of some members of the genus; plants in this genus are reportedly poisonous if ingested.

- Amorphophallus titanum O. Beccari (Amorphophallus selebicus, the Titan-Arum) is widely touted as having one of if not the largest flowers in the world; it is a true tropical and is grown only in greenhouse conservatories in our region where it gains massive press when in bloom; crowds file through the to observe the huge flower which is very malodorous when receptive to pollen; the spathe can be up to 12’ tall, resembling a giant arum; the specific epithet is in reference to the titanic flowers.

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