



Hilltop Cloud

Time Travellers Club

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May-16

www.hilltopcloud.co.uk

Dear Club Member,

Whilst I'm dyeing I usually listen to the radio. I'm not a music person, I much prefer the spoken word. During the summer the cricket commentary is my constant companion, but when the dulcet tones of Test Match Special can't soothe me through my day, I tend to listen to BBC Radio 4 Extra. I get to listen to comedy, drama, classic literature, and documentaries. Often the radio is just background, I listen with half an ear, but sometimes a programme comes on that makes me want to find out more. Mainly because I want to "see" what's being talked about. One such programme series was one called "Plants: From Roots to Riches" which covered the history of our relationships with plants over the past 250 years. A programme that particularly stuck in my mind was one about the Amazonian Water Lily. The plant itself is incredible. It has huge leaves, large enough to support a small child, and incredible flowers. The female flowers emerge white, and emit a pineapple scent and warmth. In the wild this attracts a beetle, who visits a number of flowers picking up pollen. The flower then closes, trapping a beetle inside, who bumbles around, transferring the pollen to the stigmas for fertilisation. The next day the flower then changes from white to pink, and changes sex. It now becomes male, and produces pollen of its own. The next evening beetles will pick up pollen from that plant, and transfer it to the freshly emerged female flowers.

The plant was brought back from the Amazon in the 1840's, gardeners at many of the great houses tried to get it to grow, and many succeeded, but the plants always died back before flowers emerged. Competitive gardening was a big thing amongst the Victorian Upper Classes, they tried to out-do each other with exotic plants and giant vegetables. The Duke of Devonshire was willing to throw vast amounts of money at the problem of getting the water lily to flower, and had a tenacious gardener called Paxton who came up with a number of innovative solutions to keep the lily warm enough, and maximise lighting during the British autumn. One November he succeeded, and the plant flowered outside of its natural habitat for the first time.

Happy Spinning,

Katie

PS. You can find out more about the lily, and see time lapse footage of the flowers here www.kew.org/science-conservation/plants-fungi/victoria-amazonica-giant-waterlily