



dp



# THE TREE HOUSE

## *The Humble Beginnings of a Backyard Giant*



*The vacated leaf nodes on the trunk of the Split Leaf Tree Philodendron (*Thaumatococcus bipinnatifidum*).*



For ten years, it sat in a corner of our dining room in Upstate New York. On moving day, it was about to be left behind, when a worker tucked it into a carton labeled 'Dine', the last box to make the truck. It sat in another corner, in our garage here, for a month before we got to it, thinking it was probably some miscellaneous platters or table-runners. And after all that time with no water or light, 'Tree House' was a sorry sight. Something possessed me to dig a hole out back, and I even forgot it *again* until one day I noticed a new green frond poking up from its place behind our pool. Today, it's as big as a bungalow, it serves as a 'house' for one armadillo that's burrowed under one of its three trunks, and deer bed down regularly under its canopy.

A few years ago, it put forth a blossom, or 'spathe', special in the plant world in that for two nights during its appearance of just a few days, it warms up to 114°F to attract insects to help pollinate it. What's unique

is that the Philodendron fuels this phenomenon with *fat* stored in its system, whereas in all other instances in the plant kingdom of 'thermogenic' behavior like this, *sugar* is the fuel!

*Photos: Editor*



*Spathe*

