

# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Pelican Flower



Pelican flower produces enormous trumpet-shaped flowers, which smell of rotting meat and attract flies and wasps as its pollinators.

#### **About this species:**

There are around 120 species of *Aristolochia* from the tropics and subtropics, most of which are woody vines or herbaceous perennials with heart-shaped leaves.

The extraordinary *Aristolochia grandiflora*, named in 1788 by Olof Swartz (1760-1818), has one of the largest flowers of any New World species and deserves its name 'grandiflora' (large flower). Each trumpet-shaped flower lasts for two days. On the first day it is in the female phase, attracting flies by its foul smell, similar to that of rotting meat. The flies are trapped by the downward facing hairs in the pouch of the flower to ensure pollination. On the next day, the flower changes to male phase and pollen is deposited on the pollinators, the odour disappears, the hairs wither and the insects are released.

#### **Uses:**

*Aristolochia grandiflora* is cultivated as an ornamental. This and other species of *Aristolochia* are also grown as food plants for tropical swallowtail butterflies. Extracts of the whole plant are used by traditional healers in Colombia to treat snake bites. It is also used as an antibiotic.