



These early flower fossils are so small that scientists used a scanning electron microscope to study them.

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## First Flowers

In a dense, wet forest 130 million years ago, **ferns were fertile and seed plants were prolific**. But Earth's earliest flowers were so tiny and unspectacular, they would have been **easy to overlook**.

So how did flowering plants get ahead? They **grew fast, made seeds, and lured animals** to help them fertilize and spread those seeds. These adaptations allowed them to fill open areas cleared by flood, fire, and dinosaurs.

Learn more about plant pollination in our Pollinator Garden on the east side of the Museum.



Flowering plants are also called angiosperms.

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## A Flower Explosion

Flowering plants eventually **stole the show**—but it took tens of millions of years of evolution. Today, about 90% of all plants (about 300,000 species!) produce flowers.

They thrive in a breathtaking variety of ways: as tiny free-floating **pondweeds**, undersea **grasses**, giant rainforest **trees**, small **parasites** that steal nutrients from other plants, prickly cacti, and lovely spring **wildflowers**.

## Evolving Together

As flowering plants spread, they **affected animals everywhere**. Some evolved **sweet nectars and tasty fruits** that enticed animals to pollinate their flowers and spread their seeds, while others evolved **prickly spikes and deadly poisons** that kept animals far away.

**Animals evolved, too**—with long, thin mouthparts to reach sugary plant fluids, or enzymes to break down plant poisons, for example. This epic, escalating friend-and-foe relationship continues to today.

