



CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

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INTRODUCTION

Native to the swampy areas of the southeast USA, carnivorous plants (sometimes known as insectivorous plants) are truly amazing. They derive their nutrients (but not their energy) from enticing and trapping insects into their interiors, where they digest them. Pitcher plants, sundews, and Venus flytraps are flowering perennials, and much easier to grow than you might think, once you understand their basic needs. They require very little care or attention and reward you with a fascinating little microcosm which is fun to observe. Here at Just Fruits, we have built a permanent bog garden in our sunny perennial bed. You, too, can create your own little zoo of carnivorous plants!

PLANTING AND CULTURE

SITE SELECTION

Carnivorous plants are definitely sun lovers, and most will be very unhappy in anything less than full sun. For this reason, they are not really suited for indoor growing, despite your opinion that your kitchen windowsill is an ideally sunny spot. Most modern homes have windows treated with UV filters, and for a plant, this is virtually the same as being in the shade. Plants growing in a skinny, spindly manner are shouting for more sun, and carnivorous ones are no exception. In the hottest summer months, they can tolerate less sun. Venus flytraps are sometimes grown in the shade of a tall pitcher plant.

SOIL

Potting mixes for carnivores need to be very acidic, with NO FERTILIZERS whatsoever. Fertilizers can burn their roots, and are not necessary. Remember that these plants evolved to "eat" bugs because their natural habitat in the bogs was mostly devoid of nutrients. In their natural habitat, their feet will always be wet, so the best "soil" will actually be a material to hold water, such as peat moss or sphagnum moss. A blended mix of half peat and half sand or perlite will hold water and aerate the soil as well, encouraging healthy roots.

WATER

As mentioned before, pitchers, flytraps, and sundews are native to the bogs and swamps of southeastern USA, for the most part permanently moist environments. The water in your artificial environment should come from below, rather than from sprinklers, which tend to wash the dew from the sundews and fill the pitchers, knocking them over. (Obviously, rain would be an exception to this rule.) This is best accomplished by setting the container in a tray of water about an inch deep. If your water is hard or high in mineral content, it's a good idea to use distilled water (or rainwater) once in awhile to flush out the mineral buildup, which can become toxic to carnivorous plants.

CONTAINERS

Clay pots are not recommended, since they do not retain moisture as well as glazed ceramic or plastic containers. Remember that your carnivorous babies want to stay wet, and use any decorative container you like that will best facilitate that. Most importantly, use a deeper than usual water tray to ensure that their feet stay wet. **DO NOT LET THE TRAY DRY OUT!**

GENERAL CARE

Venus flytraps send up a flower stalk when they begin spring growth. For best growth of the trap formation, remove the flower stalks before they form seeds. Dead leaves or traps are normal: trim them off. Do not feed them hamburger or bacon; they perform photosynthesis and are happy without bugs for a long time. Sit back and watch them grow in their own sweet time. Once you have established their environment (full sun, wet feet, NO FERTILIZER) all you have to do is observe these unique beauties as they entice wee bugs to their intimate parts. Don't let them dry out, and they'll happily grow and thrive. In winter, allow them to go dormant as they will in nature.

VARIETIES

Pitcher plants: *Sarracenia rubra* Wherryi, *S. minor*, *S. moorei*, *S. rosea*, *S. flava*

Venus flytraps: *Dionaea muscipula*, (and Red Dragon, the red flytrap)

Sundews: *Drosera filiformis* (Dew Threads), *D. capillaries* (pink sundew), *D. intermedia* (thinleaf sundew)