

# Carnivorous Plants and Bog Basics



Mary Ann and Andy Sudkamp for Sunnyside Nursery

## Carnivorous plants to know and grow:

- **Pitcher plants**—*Sarracenia* species—generally from the SE to the Great Lakes of the US  
E.g. *S. flava*—yellow, *S. leucophylla*—white, *S. rubra*—red, *S. purpurea*—purple (all with many subspecies and hybrids)
- **Venus Fly Traps**—*Dionaea muscipula*—from the Carolinas
- **Sundews**—*Drosera americana*—from all over the country—SE, NW...
- **Cobra Lily, California Pitcher Plant**—*Darlingtonia californica*—from N California and S Oregon



What do they have in common? They all catch and digest insects to compensate for a lack of nitrogen in their soil.

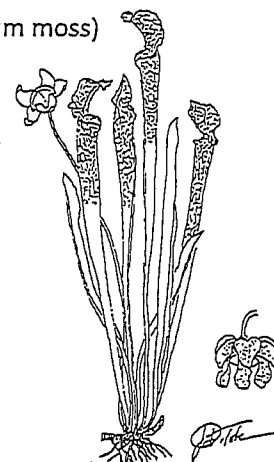
## Characteristics of carnivorous plants and their habitat:

- Generally weak-rooted perennials that do not tolerate root competition from other plants
- Usually grow in wet, acidic soils with flowing water (**NOT** stagnant water.)
- Tolerant of low nutrient levels in the soil (many grow in peat, which is decomposed sphagnum moss)
- Grow best in bright full sunlight



## Grow them:

- In pots. (except *Darlingtonia*) Place a saucer under them and keep it full of water & protect from hard freezes in winter.
- In a greenhouse (but most will need a cold dormant period, unless you get into the tropical ones)
- Outside in a bog you can create.



## How to construct a bog: (The same principles apply to planting in a container, just skip step 2)



1. Select a sunny spot in the garden where you can enjoy the plants.
2. Dig a hole in the garden and line it with pond liner, or sink a bathtub or garden pool or...
3. Poke or cut ¼ " holes in the bottom of the chosen container. (You don't want standing, stagnant water.)
4. In one corner, set a black plastic pot with drainage holes to use as a watering reservoir.
5. Fill the area with pre-wetted Canadian peat moss (or a combination of Canadian peat and 1/3 sand) up to the top, leaving the plastic pot unfilled. (The peat should come up to the very rim of the pot.)
6. Water the peat to settle it in and flatten it out.
7. Plant your carnivorous friends at the same level they are at when you buy them. Don't sink the crowns.
8. Fill the water reservoir. It should slowly seep into the peat bog and will keep the soil wet and fresh.

## Maintenance:

Generally, once you've made the initial trouble of constructing suitable habitat, they are surprisingly maintenance-free. Weeds tend not to grow well in the acidic peat. Pull the occasional exception. We have never fertilized our bog in 9 years. Bugs are their fertilizer.

You will, however, need to fill the water reservoir every day in our summer drought. Above all, keep the root zone wet. Not a problem here in our winters!

We cut last year's pitchers off in spring before new growth occurs to keep them tidy.

We have found that *Darlingtonia* benefits greatly from a thick carpet of living sphagnum moss over its roots. It needs a cool root zone to mimic the cold seeps it grows in in Oregon.

In contrast, the *Sarracenia* species seem to resent this. Being southerners, they like a warmer root zone, so keep sphagnum pulled away from their crowns.



**Sources:** Oudean's Nursery in Snohomish, <http://www.oudeanswillowcreeknursery.com/>  
Courting Frog's Nursery in Stanwood <http://courtingfrogs.com/>  
*Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada*. D. E. Schnell. 2002. Timber Press, OR

