



Carnivorous Plants

*For more information about the
Colorado Water Garden Society
or other aspects of pond keeping along the front-range go to:*

<http://www.colowatergardensociety.org>

or send an e-mail to:

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www.colowatergardensociety.org

Carnivorous plants are as fascinating for adults as they are for kids. Capturing and eating insects are unique adaptations they use to obtain nutrients unavailable in their poor soil conditions. With their extraordinary leaf and flower forms, these denizens of the bog look almost alien. Colorful and dramatic, their striking beauty alone is reason enough to try growing this fascinating group of plants.

CONTAINERS & WATERING

Although carnivorous plants can grow in the bog garden, they are excellent candidates for containers. In Colorado's dry climate, containers provide the humidity many species need, show case the stately specimens, and bring them closer to the eye. Plastic pots, glazed ceramics, wood containers lined with plastic, or any waterproof vessel is suitable for planting. Use your imagination. Choose a container that matches a garden theme from the whimsical to pure art.

The easiest method to grow carnivorous plants is the "tray" system. Pots with drainage holes are placed in saucers, water is added, and left standing. Moisture is wicked up through the soil by capillary action, creating the bog conditions in which they thrive. With this method, you literally water from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

When using non-draining vessels, you must pay attention to the water level beneath the soil. Carnivorous plants need oxygen, yet some are adapted to wetter environments than others are, so it is important to have a means of gauging the height of the water level. A section of 1" diameter PVC pipe buried vertically in the soil from the bottom of the container to the soil line will show you the water level at a glance. A piece of bark can hide the pipe.

If the container is large enough, you can create hills and valleys of soil to accommodate a number of plants with different moisture requirements in the same container.

It is important to use water that is not alkaline. Most carnivorous plants will eventually die if they are given water with minerals or chemical additives. Distilled water or rainwater is best. If this is not practical, simply allow tap water to stand for several days allowing chlorine and fluorine gas to escape.

LIGHT

Being denizens of the bog, carnivorous plants like bright sun. Since most come from humid environments, you must take care because of Colorado's dry conditions. Outdoors, droplets of nectar that form on the plants can act as miniature magnifying lenses in our intense sun. This can burn the foliage and dry up tentacles. In our state, an eastern exposure with only a short period of direct sun or bright indirect sun is desirable for outdoor planting. Shade from companion plants or other objects can help reduce light intensity so nectar won't burn the leaves. Indoor growing is easiest on a windowsill. The exposure is not critical because the window screen generally provides 50% shade.

HUMIDITY

Outdoors, it is important to provide as much humidity around the crown of the plants as possible. This can be done by planting the soil level 4" – 5" below the rim of the container. Such a measure is not necessary indoors. Carnivorous plants thrive in the more humid environment of a terrarium or in a humidity tray on a windowsill.

SOIL

Most carnivorous plants do well in a soil comprised of one part fine sphagnum peat moss to one part play sand. Other types of sand are usually not washed and will be too alkaline for the acid conditions preferred by most carnivorous plants. Before potting, wet the ingredients in a bucket to the consistency of a wrung out sponge. Change the soil once per year, washing the old soil from the roots in a bucket of water. This eliminates any moss, fungus, pests, or weeds that are present.

DORMANCY

Tropical carnivorous plants can be grown indoors year round, if kept wet. However, *temperate* species will decline and die if dormancy requirements are not followed. During the dormancy period, which is typically from November 1st to April 1st, these plants need less light and water. One way to overwinter your plants is to place them in an attached garage near a light source, such as a side door. Heat loss from the house should keep the garage between 40° – 50° Fahrenheit. In April, place them on a sunny windowsill. When new growth begins to replace the previous year's foliage, cut off the old foliage and allow the new leaves to take over photosynthesis. When our last frost date approaches in May, you may place them in an outdoor or indoor location of your choice. The following November, return the *temperate* plants to their Winter locations for dormancy. *Tropical* and *subtropical* specimens can continue to delight the eye throughout the Winter.

TO FERTILIZE OR NOT TO FERTILIZE ...

Carnivorous plants are uniquely adapted to obtain nutrients by capturing and digesting insects. They literally use insects as their vitamin pills; there is no need to fertilize them. In most cases, fertilizer will kill or severely burn the plant. You will not need to feed your plants because nature has provided them the means to feed themselves. For those enclosed in terrariums, monthly or bi-monthly feeding may be necessary.

PLANTING & CARE

When planting, place the crown of the plant at the soil surface. If the crown shows a direction of growth, place the plant at the side of the pot, pointing the growth toward the center of the pot. Otherwise, plant the plant in the center of the pot. Trimming off dead foliage, watering, respecting dormancy, and an annual soil change are about all that is needed to care for your carnivorous plants.

With over 600 species of carnivorous plants in unimaginably beautiful forms to choose from, the possibilities are endless. Jump in! The water is fine.

RESOURCES

There is a wealth of information and plant sources available. Two excellent books that also offer websites are:

The Savage Garden, by Peter D'Amato, © 1998. ISBN 0-89815-915-6

Carnivorous Plants of the World, by James and Patricia Pietropaolo, © 1989, updated 2001. ISBN 088192-356-7

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