

in the water before wetting the soil helps reduce transplant shock. 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* carnivores can be grown indoors year round, if kept wet. However, *temperate* species will decline and die if dormancy requirements are not respected. During the dormancy period, which is typically from November 1 to April 1, these plants need less light and water. One way to over-winter your plants is to place them in an attached garage near a light source, such as a side door. Heat loss from the house will keep such a garage at about 40-50 degrees. In April, place them on a sunny window sill. 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 can place them in outdoor or indoor locations you choose. 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. In most cases, fertilizer will kill or severely burn the plant. You will not need to feed your plants because nature has provided the bribery and traps necessary for these sneaky little devils to feed themselves. For those enclosed in terrariums, monthly or bi-monthly feeding may be necessary.

### PLANTING & CARE

When planting place the crown just 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. Otherwise, plant the carnivore 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 menagerie.

With over 600 species of carnivores in unimaginably-beautiful forms to choose from, why not enjoy these unusual plants? Jump in! The water is fine.

### RESOURCES

There is a wealth of information and plant sources available. Two excellent books that also include 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



Colorado Water Garden Society

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# Carnivorous Plants



By John F. Bayard

**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 the poor soils in which they grow. 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 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 not only provide the humidity that many species need, but showcase the stately specimens and bring smaller treasures closer to the eye. Plastic pots, glazed ceramics, wood containers lined with plastic, or any waterproof vessel is suitable. Use your imagination. Choose a container that matches a garden theme from the whimsical to pure art.



When using non-draining vessels you must pay attention to the water table (level of water beneath the soil).

Carnivorous plants need oxygen, yet some are adapted to wetter niches than others, so it is important to have a means of gauging the height of the water table. 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 vessel.

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

It is important to use water that is not alkaline. Most carnivores will eventually die if they are given water with minerals or chemical additives. Distilled water or rain water is best. If this is not practical, simply use tap water that has been left standing in a bucket for several days; this allows chlorine and fluorine gas to escape.



## LIGHT

Being denizens of the bog, carnivorous plants like bright sun. Since most come from humid environments, one must be careful in 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. Indoors, on a window sill, 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 with a soil level 4"- 5" below the rim of the container. Such a measure is usually not necessary indoors. Carnivorous plants thrive in the more humid environment of a terrarium or on a humidity tray on a window sill.

## SOIL

Most carnivorous plants do well in a soil of one part fine sphagnum peat moss to one part play sand. Other sand is usually not washed and will be too alkaline for the acid conditions preferred by most carnivores. Before potting, wet the ingredients in a bucket to the consistency of a wrung out sponge. Mixing a root hormone, such as Superthrive,