

Pitcher Plant

Sarracenia

Carnivorous plants are both fascinating and beautiful. With their highly developed insect lures they are wonderful plants for children to study, or for the most enthralled enthusiast to collect.

Species

Sarracenia are named after an early Canadian discoverer, Dr. M. S. Sarrazin. There are eight species in the family and many hybrids occurring naturally and horticulturally. The species are: *S. purpurea*, *S. flava*, *S. alata*, *S. oreophila*, *S. minor*, *S. psittacina*, *S. rubra* and *S. leucophylla*, and they are found growing naturally in various wet places throughout eastern North America.

The pitchers of the different species vary in height from 10-120cm. Flowers are produced in Spring and are either red, green or yellow, depending on species.

Feeding

The plant attracts its prey by secreting a nectar from glands around the hood and nectar roll at the mouth of the pitcher. The insect follows the downward pointing hairs on the hood to an area where it loses its footing and falls into the pitcher. In *S. purpurea*, the insect falls into a bath of liquid, drowns, and bacterial activity takes over - the plant absorbing the required nutrients through glands in the lower part of the pitcher. In the other species, the digestive glands secrete protein digesting enzymes and fluids which break down the insect body.

Position

Pitcher plants are very much at home in temperate Australia providing they are supplied with the correct conditions. They may be grown inside or outside, but in both cases must be kept wet and humid with adequate ventilation and in direct sunlight.

Watering

Stand the pot in a wide saucer or tray of water up to 2.5cm deep. Rainwater

or distilled water is preferable and tap water is acceptable providing the plant is leached often to prevent a build up of salts in the potting medium. To do this, water through the top of the pot, empty all water from the tray, then refill with fresh water. This should be done at least twice a week. Take advantage of any rainfall by placing the plant outside.

Pitcher plants will grow best outside but can be damaged by strong winds and heavy rain. Newly purchased plants should not be subjected to hot sun straight away but gradually hardened. All Sarracenias need a dormant period in winter when the tops of the pitchers dry out. During this time the plant can be placed outside and left, and artificial lighting and heating must be avoided. The brown tops of the pitchers should be trimmed off, leaving the green portions which are still useful to the plant.

Potting

Flowering, followed by new pitcher growth, will appear in early Spring. Repotting should be done in early to mid-Spring when new growth is evident, using two parts imported peat moss to one part coarse washed river sand. Some growers use straight sphagnum moss or a mixture of sphagnum and peat moss.

Pitcher plants grow from a rhizome which often branches into several growth crowns. Every two to three years the rhizome may be divided using a clean sharp knife and making sure each division has roots attached. This will maintain healthy growth and produce new plants. Useful reference books are: *Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada* by Donald Schnell, and *Carnivorous Plants* by Adrian Slack.

