

Wallsend Nurseries

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Carnivorous Plants

One of the most interesting group of plants for people to collect are the carnivorous plants. These actually attract, capture, kill & eat animals.....mostly insects! Their methods of attracting a potential meal are many but are often associated with bright attractive colourings & interesting odours that the insects find irresistible. Sundews have sticky hairs all over the upper leaf surfaces, Pitchers have water filled trumpet like leaves ,& some, namely the so called Venus' Fly Trap ,have actually managed to evolve a decent set of fast moving jaws to capture their prey.

Most of these plants are adapted to eat animals because the soils they grow in are often very poor in the nutrients.....especially Nitrogen, that plants need to grow. In most cases the soils are also boggy or permanently wet for most of the year adding further to the difficulties.

Although there are many more species of carnivorous plants in existence, in Australia we tend to grow four of the most popular. This is probably because they are not too hard to grow given the right conditions.

Venus Fly Trap (Dionea muscipula)

Undoubtedly the most popular of this plant group to grow owing to its "active" trap system. This means that the traps will actively spring shut whenever an unsuspecting insect ventures into it's jaws capturing the prey ready for digestion. For best results here you really must have bright light. Even full sun is ok for these monsters of the plant world. If the plants are receiving enough light the traps will have a bright red interior which is used to attract the insects of the plant's diet. Green , weak growth is a sure sign that not enough light is being received. Stand the pot in a shallow tray of water as these really appreciate moisture during the growing season. Let the plants dry out a little during the dormant Winter months (May to October). Flowering stalks are produced during Spring & should be removed as they appear as they will greatly weaken the plant if allowed to set seed. Repot in Spring if necessary into a mix made up of 3 parts peat moss to 1 part of washed river sand.

Pitcher Plants.....(Sarracenia spp.)

These need plenty of sunlight with the pot sitting in a shallow tray of water. Insufficient light will cause a lack of colouring & long, leggy pitchers. It is always best to protect the plant from strong windy spots as the pitchers are easily broken or bent. Pitchers go into a dormant stage during Winter also & should be kept a little drier at this time to prevent rotting.

Pitcher Plants....(Nepenthes spp.)

These grow best with about 50% shade & they must also have high humidity as they are of tropical origin. Nepenthes like plenty of water for good growth but the potting mix needs to be well drained as they can suffer from root rot. Repotting should be done during the growing period in Summer. A mix made up of equal parts of peat moss, river sand & perlite or vermiculite will be ok. As these plants are actually climbers with the interesting pitchers hanging from the ends of the foliage, you will need to provide a stake or similar support for them to grow on. In fernery or glasshouse conditions it is even a good idea to provide a trellis or pole for them to use as support.

Sundews...(Drosera spp)

Sundews are the easiest of the carnivorous plants to grow. They require very high light to produce the best colour & prefer to be kept constantly moist too. Same potting mix as for should be used as for the venus' fly trap. Drosera also have a short dormant period during Winter for most species although some are Winter growers & become dormant during Summer. Reduce watering during the dormant period. Drosera frequently set seed & can spread to completely cover the pot surface in less than a season. Some species are so prolific, that if grown in fernery or glasshouse conditions, will often cover the floor or even moist spots on the benching!!