



## ***What's The Pitch On Pitcher Plants?***

Pitcher plants (*Sarracenia* spp.) and their friends, the sundews (*Drosera* spp.) and the Bladderworts (*Utricularia* spp.) are the most common insectivorous plants in North America. *Sarracenias* have evolved to catch insects to supplement their diet, taking advantage of the wet, low nutrient content of the acidic bogs where they are found. These herbaceous perennials have modified leaves resembling tubes or pitchers, that allow insects to fall in, become trapped and ultimately, digested.

Most *Sarracenias* are native to the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern U.S. with *S. purpurea* extending into Nova Scotia and across Canada into British Columbia, proving their hardiness for almost any garden.

All that being said, *Sarracenia* are very easy to grow. They should be grown outside year 'round so they are able to go dormant and rest for the winter. Large plastic or ceramic pots are our favorite way to garden with *Sarracenia*. This actually allows you to include many companions of *Sarracenia*, which include mosses, sedges, and orchids. If you are lucky enough to have the space, an in-ground bog is the ultimate sanctuary.

### ***CULTIVATION***

**Soil:** *In the wild, Sarracenia typically grow in very moist sandy and peaty soil.* Typically close to a 50/50 ratio of sand to peat moss is appropriate. Mix the soil in a bucket or wheelbarrow using plenty of water to ensure that your mix is completely saturated. If the weight of your container is a concern, perlite can be used in place of sand, with peat moss being the critical ingredient. Any of these three ingredients are readily available at your neighborhood garden center.

**Light:** *Sarracenia are happiest in full sun.* We recommend at least 6 to 8 hours of full sun daily. Although shade won't hurt them, the boundless array of colors of the pitchers will not be nearly as spectacular, nor will the plants flower in the shade.

**Water:** *Water and water quality are possibly the most critical factors for your Sarracenia.* All carnivorous plants require constant moisture via low ph, and mineral free water. Rainwater is generally your best friend. In the absence of rain, a common occurrence here in NJ, distilled water is your next best bet. Many *Sarracenia* have died from being watered with tap water. Public water will damage or kill your pitcher plants 9 times out of 10. Testing your water is an inexpensive way to be safe and sure. Test kits are available at a hardware store or your local garden center. **Absolutely, under no circumstance, should you allow your bog or your plants to dry out. Sarracenia and other carnivorous plants do not recover from drying out, they die!**

## **THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF BOG GARDENING**

Over the years, we have developed the do's and don'ts of bog gardening

- **Do** plant in full sun
- **Do** plant in a peat-based mix
- **Do** select bog plants appropriate for your climate
- **Don't** fertilize your plants – *Sarracenia* “feed” themselves – fertilizer salts kill carnivorous plants
- **Don't** ever allow them to dry out - ample moisture is their primary growth requirement
- **Don't** use tap water- unless you know what is in it – buy a test kit or use rain water
- **Don't** collect or buy plants collected from the wild

## **WINTER BOG GARDEN CARE**

What do you do now? Help your plants experience DORMANCY either outside in the garden or inside in a cool, unheated basement or garage. Recreating the natural dormancy is the secret to successful bog gardening.

The process begins when the plants experience a combination of shorter day length and cooler temperatures. The easiest way to begin the process is to leave your bog outside until after Thanksgiving, then, depending on your available conditions, either:

1. For those *with* outside gardening space - place your bog inside the big black nursery pot you got at the bog workshop (place some leaves in the bottom of the big pot first) and mulch it with a few inches of leaves or pine needles.
2. For those *without* outside gardening space - move the bog into your basement or garage until late March or April.

Cutting back the plant growth before or after the winter dormancy period is more a question of aesthetics than horticultural necessity. If neatness is your thing, cut back and clean up your bog now. It's simpler than trying to trim in spring with new growth just starting up. However Nature doesn't do that so leaving the “natural look” is OK too. Water the bog before putting it away for the winter and check it maybe monthly to be sure it doesn't dry out. In the cooler conditions and with no plant growth occurring little additional moisture should be required.

If your bog will be outside and you didn't get a big black pot then just tuck it into a sheltered corner of your garden and mulch it. Some gardeners even dig out a space and place the whole bog a few inches into the ground for frost protection, not necessary in most areas but if heavy frost is a concern then take that approach.

**Remember your bog must never dry out and would really like a winter rest.**

## **CONSERVATION AWARENESS**

Finally, a quick note on carnivorous plants in the wild: **NEVER, EVER collect or dig plants from the wild.** Poaching poses a serious threat to the wild propagation of pitcher plants, right behind habitat destruction. Also, only buy nursery propagated plants. If in doubt about the source, don't buy. All of our plants at RareFind are either seed grown or are from tissue culture programs.

If you go bog-hopping, remember: tread lightly, don't take any plants and leave the surroundings as if you were never there.