

REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Sarracenia Pitcher Plants

A Garden Guide

The genus *Sarracenia* is the largest of the hardy carnivorous plant genera, and is native to North America. They range broadly from Eastern Texas through coastal areas of the south, and along the Atlantic coast up into southern Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Sarracenias have been known since the 1500's, but their purpose and methods were not really understood until the nineteenth century.



Unlike the bear trap-like apparatus of Venus Flytraps that close and trap insects, Pitcher Plants entice insects with pheromones and nectar. Once inside the pitcher, tiny hairs inside point downward, allowing the insect to enter but not exit. They come in a multitude of colors, shapes and sizes, and their unique foliage and amazing flowers are hard to resist. They range in size from 6" to 36", and flower in the spring with large drooping petals in several colors. Even the seed pods that remain after flowering are exotic and sometimes mistaken for flowers.

Many species and hybrids are hardy in zone 6, a few into zone 5, and *Sarracenia purpurea* are hardy even to zone 3. They are considered threatened in the wild because of over collection and loss of habitat. The plants sold here at Reems Creek are cultivated from existing stock by propagation, and are never collected in the wild. There are at least 8 species of Sarracenias, and since the range of many species overlap, they readily hybridize in the wild, and are easily hybridized artificially in cultivation. The hybrids are all fertile, and as a result there are many hybrids and possible variants available in the trade.

General Care: Pitcher plants grow best in sunny conditions (6-8 hours of direct sunlight). Very few other plants are happy in the nutrient poor natural environment of these plants, so their habitat tends to be open and sunny. They do engage in some photosynthesis, but primarily use their unique method of obtaining nutrients by attracting and digesting insects.

Their native habitat is warm and humid in the summer and chilly to frosty in the winter. As a result, a period of dormancy of two or three months is absolutely essential in the winter. During this time pitcher plants kept indoors should be removed to a cool location in a temperature range of 32 to 50 degrees, and allowed to rest. Pitchers will naturally turn brown, and occasionally winter leaves will appear. Just remember they're not dying, they're just resting, and if not allowed to rest, they will exhaust their energy and die. At the end of this dormancy period, with the exception of purplea they should be cut back all the way, and soon new vigorous growth will resume. Since many are hardy in our climate, it is possible to grow them outdoors in simple to construct specialty bogs where they will assume their natural growth cycle. Be sure to visit our pitcher plant bog next to our display pond when shopping at the garden center.

Watering: To grow healthy carnivorous plants it is important to keep the soil wet at all times. The best way to do this is to keep the plants in a tray or saucer that is filled with water as needed. While they like to be damp, they do not like to be immersed in water above the soil line. Always use mineral-free water. Rain water or distilled water is fine, but avoid bottled water, well water or tap water.

Fertilizing: Pitcher plants do not like to be fertilized, and the minerals in tap water can over fertilize and "burn" the plants. In a pinch tap water can be used, but a steady diet of tap water, well water, or spring water is detrimental, and ultimately fatal. If repotting do not use potting soil, or anything with fertilizer. Peat, with the addition of a little sand, is the recommended media. The peat will keep the pH in the desired 5.0 range.

Feeding: Plants grown indoors can be placed outdoors on a deck or patio during the growing season allowing them access to natural prey. Feeding by hand is fine, but it's interesting to gaze into the pitchers and see what hapless creatures have fallen for the pitchers' wily deceptions.

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