

NORTH AMERICAN PITCHER PLANTS (SARRACENIA), L TO R, S. 'MAROON' WITHOUT AND WITH FLASH), S. X MOOREI AND S. 'SCARLET BELLE' (CLOSEUP AND IN GROUP)



CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

***SOME LOVE OUR GARDEN, OTHERS
DON'T -- BUT ALL ARE FASCINATING!***

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Gardening attracts folks mainly for three reasons: beauty, healthier food and wildlife value. But how about growing plants that turn the tables on the animal world and eat THEM?

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www.natureswayresources.com

As a retired herpetologist and longtime nature guide, especially for children's activities at Jesse Jones Park in Humble, I often heard adults comment about how easy it is to get kids interested in animals. But they were often clueless about how to get these same kids interested in plants!

Then I had an epiphany: Plants that EAT animals! The rest is history. Pretty soon I was hooked, and 25 years later, my wife Stephanie and I tend 20,000+ plants daily in our Spring area backyard and greenhouse, the base of PetFlyTrap.com, one of the largest online carnivorous plant nurseries in the nation, with the nation's most diverse selection in stock. Talk about a conversation starter!

We import nursery- or lab-grown plants from across the globe and clone them—a year or more process that results in thousands of plants. Intrigued about growing some?

Over 850 species of carnivorous plants (CPs) are found from the Arctic Circle to the tropics. CPs have the ability to attract, capture and digest prey because they grow in acidic, nutrient-deficient soil. They die if planted in alkaline, nutrient-rich potting soil or in the ground.

Not all CPs have the same care requirements! Because of this, most CPs are not suited for in-ground home gardens. On the other hand, others like North American Pitcher Plants in the genus *Sarracenia* (pictured at top) are wonderful in outdoor raised beds, planters, and even in a properly prepared landscape bed.

With carnivorous plants found all over the world and in different habitats, if there's a place you want to grow a plant (indoors, outdoors, full sun, full shade), chances are carnivorous plant can be grown there. Carnivorous plants are non-specific: anything they can catch – pests and beneficial insects alike – will be digested.

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Most CPs do not have well-known common names. Scientific names, such as *Sarracenia*, are often the only ones used. An exception: Venus Flytrap, seasonally found in nurseries and plant centers. Know the genus name? It's *Dionaea*.

(Pictured ready to snap shut on a meal!)

On the plus side, Venus Flytraps ARE suited for year-round outdoor growing in Houston. They grow and divide indefinitely with partial sun in summer, especially in the afternoon. However, they are not the monstrous plants Hollywood makes them out to be! Traps of the largest are little over two inches in length.

Because of their unique soil and habitat conditions, most CPs are very uncommon in the wild, and are usually illegal to collect. Even within a given genus, some varieties might be good choices for your growing conditions, while others might not.

For year-round outdoor growing, North American Pitcher Plants (genus *Sarracenia*) are most ideal, as they can handle our scorching summer heat/sun and moderate winter freezes.

Venus Flytraps (*Dionaea*) and certain sticky-leaved Sundews (*Drosera*), Butterworts (*Pinguicula*), and Bladderworts (*Utricularia*) can be grown outdoors in our area year-round as well. Many of the spectacular Tropical Pitcher Plants (*Nepenthes*) can also be grown outdoors in full shade, when temperatures are above 55°.



Sarracenias, left, in inground beds. Center: Sticky tentacles of the Sundew plant (Drosera) are a death sentence for pest insects. Right: With preparation, Pitcher Plants (Sarracenia) can be a unique and spectacular addition to the garden.

As with many horticultural businesses (and subsequent online ordering), we have seen skyrocketing interest in CPs; so much so, we have increased donations to some favorite nonprofit organizations such as [Hope Center Houston](#) and the [Watson Rare Native Plant Preserve](#). [The Watson Preserve](#) is a spectacular place to see native Texas carnivorous plants in the wild.

Hopefully this article helps you understand that carnivorous plants are fun, easy and rewarding to grow; but education about specific choices before planting is essential. But it's also easy to kill them if you try to grow them like mainstream house/garden plants. Whether indoors or outdoors, sun or shade, channel your interest into the ones that are best suited for your growing conditions/climate.

Working with the plants is certainly fun, but as Stephanie will tell you, our larger goal is to teach about wetland loss and preservation, and pull more children into loving plants, by first grabbing their attention with the carnivorous aspects.

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