

### ***Carnivorous Plants***

The Conservatory of Flowers in San Francisco is currently running a carnivorous plant show called "Chomp." The event started in May, and will end November 4th. The plants are on loan from California Carnivores in Sebastopol.

The main plants on display are flytraps, pitchers, sundews and bladderworts. The exhibit features plants in their original bog-like environment, complete with humidity and intermittent moisture.

These days, carnivorous plants aren't just for kids, although most children are fascinated by them. Adults attending the plant show can also learn about the environment where these plants live and why they are important.

Over 600 types of carnivorous plants have been discovered in existence, although many are now extinct. Carnivorous plants live on almost every continent (except Antarctica) and in every state in the U.S. Most are rare, and poaching (stealing plants from the wild) is common. Housing developments, the loss of peat bogs (sold as peat moss in stores), and acid rain contribute to the loss of plants. Sadly, only 3-5% of original populations remain in the wild.

So why do carnivorous plants capture insects and sometimes lizards, frogs and small monkeys? The answer is that carnivorous plants often live in nutrient poor environments where most plants cannot survive. In order to thrive in these environments, carnivorous plants have developed their leaves to capture prey. The prey provides the extra nutrients needed by the plant.

Here are some types of carnivorous plants and their trapping methods:

1. Venus flytrap: when small trigger hairs on the leaves are touched twice within about 30 seconds, a trap will close within one second. The trap then tightens, seals itself and digests the insect. Venus flytraps are native to North and South Carolina, although they can be found growing in other neighboring states.

2. Pitcher plant: small pitchers (actually leaves) invite insects and other small creatures in for a drink. However, tiny hairs all point downward to the bottom of the plant, which makes it difficult for a victim to get its footing and crawl back out. The bottom of the plant is filled with digestive juices.

3. Sundews: these plants have a sticky substance on tentacles attached to their leaves. The "dew" is a mixture of nectar, adhesive compounds and digestive juices. Insects literally stick to them like flypaper and are slowly digested.

4. Bladderworts: a curious plant whose interesting behavior was discovered in 1876 by

scientist Mary Treat. The trap is set by the action of pumping water out of the bladder, resulting in lower water pressure inside. An insect that bumps against the "door" of the bladder triggers it, resulting in a strong suction that traps the insect inside within 1/30<sup>th</sup> of a second.

According to the International Carnivorous Plant Society (ICPS), growing carnivorous plants isn't easy. They can often be found locally, but may not be in the best health. The president of the ICPS mentions on his website that most flytraps and other carnivorous plants for sale are usually half dead when you purchase them.

It's important to buy plants from reputable nurseries that do not collect specimens from the wild. This link will list several places worldwide that carry specimens checked by a reputable source. <http://www.sarracenia.com/faq/faq6280.html>