

Carnivorous Plants

By Marketa Janouchova

Carnivorous plants (see page 6) are insect-eating plants. They have developed ways of attracting, trapping and digesting insects, to obtain nutrients that the plants may be unable to find elsewhere. In total there are over 650 species of carnivorous plants. Here are just a few of them.



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Venus Flytrap

Venus Flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) has sensitive bristles on a leaf folded in the middle. Nectar on the leaf can attract a fly and as soon as the fly lands on it, the bristles act like triggers and the leaf folds. It closes so quickly that the fly will be caught inside – a little like toast being held in the toaster. The fly cannot get out as the spines on the rim of the leaf imprison it inside. What a lunch the plant has!

The Pitcher Plant

Pitcher Plants (e. g. *Heliophora chimanthensis* or *Sarracenia purpurea*) have leaves curled into a long tube, a bit like a trumpet or a jug, creating a trap for insects. The insects are attracted to nectar glands at the top of the plant. The hungry insects try to investigate what delicacies are left at the bottom of the “jug”, then slide down and fall into water, which has collected in the traps. The insects drown and are digested.



Photo courtesy of Arpingstone



Photo © Robbie Murphy

Sundew

Sundews (e. g. *Drosera rotundifolia*) have ruby-red stalked glands, which look like and behave a bit like little tentacles, covered with droplets of sticky liquid. Insects are attracted to the plants as they think the sticky dew on the glands is nectar (it contains sugars) but instead of getting a sip of tasty juice they get stuck (a bit like a fly in honey) and cannot move. The plants then use their “tentacles” in a way the octopus would, together with their digestive juices (which are as strong as acid in our stomachs), to hold and digest their prey.

Butterwort

Butterworts (e. g. *Pinguicula vulgaris*) have sticky glands all over the leaf surfaces to trap insects. The leaves are shiny and oily and to an insect can look very much like a “battered pancake”. The insect might think what a lovely breakfast it will have if it bites into the leaves but instead ends up being breakfast itself! Once it becomes stuck, the leaves roll in and the insect is digested in a similar way that of the Sundews.



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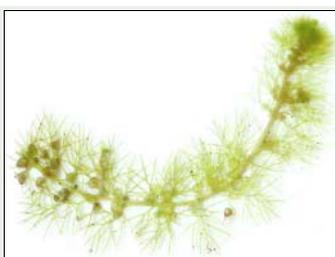


Photo courtesy of Veledan

Bladderwort

As the name suggests, Bladderworts (e. g. *Utricularia minor*) use bladders to trap insects. The plants grow in fresh water and their fleshy branches are filled with air to help them float. The bladders look as if they also help the plants to flow. However, aquatic animals are sucked into them and there is no way of escaping!