

## PITCHER PLANT CARE SHEET

(*Sarracenia spp.*)

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Once you understand their needs, Pitcher Plants (genus *Sarracenia*) are very easy to care for. They require specific conditions in order to thrive, but those conditions are very easy to meet. You just need wet, acidic, nutrient poor soil, lots of sun, and clean water--all of which can also be provided either indoors or outdoors.

**CONTAINER:** To start, you will need a non-draining container: plastic and glazed ceramic are excellent. Do not use cement, concrete or terra cotta containers—the minerals will kill the plants. Pitcher Plants make excellent windowsill plants, and are also able to live outdoors year-round in bog gardens. Old bathtubs make especially attractive bog gardens, as will old whiskey barrels lined with plastic. If you're feeling especially ambitious, you can use an aquatic pond mold to establish a permanent bog garden. Make sure any bog garden you establish is situated in a very sunny area.

**SOIL:** Fill the container with a one-to-one mix of peat and sterilized sand, like that used for sandboxes (do not use river sand or beach sand: salts quickly kill bog plants). Placing a layer of long-grain sphagnum moss over the soil mix is optional but will help to retain the soil's moisture, which is crucial for the wellbeing of a Pitcher Plant.

**WATER:** Pitcher Plants like boggy, humid environments, so make sure their soil remains constantly moist. Use distilled water, rainwater or water collected from condensation, like from an air conditioner. Even though our local water is relatively soft, it is not a good idea to use regular tap water as your main water source—it will lessen the acidity of your bog, and too many chemicals and minerals will harm bog plants.

**LIGHT:** Although they need moist soil, Pitcher Plants need lots of sun. Be sure to place your plants in an area that will get at least six to eight hours of direct summer sunlight each day in summer. Sunny south-facing decks, porches or windowsills are perfect for them.

**FERTILIZER:** No fertilizer is necessary for Pitcher Plants; in fact, doing so might kill them, as they are accustomed to nutrient-poor soil. Pitcher Plants supplement their diet by trapping prey, which should give your plant all the nourishment it needs.

**OVERWINTERING:** Like most temperate zone plants, Pitcher Plants require a period of dormancy in order to stay healthy. As noted above, Pitcher Plants are able to spend their winter dormancy in an outdoor bog garden, and container plants can often survive the winter in a cool garage. Pitcher Plants in outdoor gardens should be covered with about three inches of pine needle mulch in late fall. But if an outdoor garden is not an option, Pitcher Plants can be overwintered in your refrigerator! Before the first frost of autumn, gently remove the plant from its summer lodgings, wash the plant and its roots clean, trimming off dead leaves. Place it inside a Ziploc plastic bag with a moist bit of long grain sphagnum moss and a dash of fungicide to prevent rot. Leave the plant in the refrigerator for at least three months, and replant in spring.

**RANDOM TIPS:** Pitcher plants are tough, but should never be allowed to dry out. They will thrive in water-logged conditions--even more wet than sundews or Venus Flytrap--so don't be shy with the water. The pitchers of *Sarracenia purpurea*, unlike its southern trumpet pitcher cousins, are long-lived and can survive up to three years. When the plant reaches maturity—about three or four years of age—a very beautiful, strange reddish pink bloom on a tall stalk will erupt from the rosette of pitchers in early summer. The display is quite spectacular.