# Collectors Corner Fact Sheet

# SARRACENIA – PITCHER PLANT


Sarracenia hybrid

## History

Sarracenia are named after an early discoverer, Dr M.S. Sarrasin of Quebec. There are 8 species and many natural hybrids in addition to many man made hybrids. The species are: S. purpurea, S. flava, S. alata, S. oreophila, S. minor, S. psittacina, S. rubra and S. leucophylla. Sarracenia are natives of eastern USA, where they grow in open grassland where the ground does not dry out. Some species experience snow and frost for short periods.

## Description

The leaves of the plant are folded into a kind of elongated funnel to form the traps or pitchers. These vary in size, ranging from 10cm to 120cm and may be upright or prostrate depending on the species or hybrid. Each flower stalk bears only one flower, which appears in spring. Flowers are up to 10cm across, petals last only a few days but the flower cone can remain many months and can be left on the plant until it goes brown. Sarracenias are equipped with nectar-secreting glands that attract insects towards the trap. The inner lip is smooth and very slippery and the inner wall is covered with hairs pointing downwards, preventing any retreat. Victims drown in the liquid at the bottom of the trap. Digestive glands then secrete protein digesting enzymes and fluids which break down the insect body. Sarracenias attract a wide range of insects including European wasps. Leaves that appear to be dying should not be removed only trimmed.

## Position

Sarracenias are best grown outdoors in full sun or partial shade. The leaves will last longer and retain the bright colours if they can be protected from harsh winds. Sarras will grow well in glasshouse without heating, in shade houses and ferneries the plants will not be as strong or colourful. Sarras are often used as bog plants in fish ponds but they should not be immersed in the water. The bright colours on the leaves are controlled by the amount of sunlight the plant receives and can result in brilliant vivid colours, excessive shade will turn the new growth green. More exposure will make the leaf shorter and stronger. Sarras may also be grown indoors provided the plants are kept wet with adequate ventilation and light. Sarras prefer colder climates as they require a winter dormant period for optimum growth and will tolerate frosts and very cold conditions while resting.

## Watering

The potting media must be kept moist to wet throughout the whole year period. Watering can be reduced during the winter dormancy period. If temperatures are high, it is very important to keep the media wet otherwise the new growth may suffer and distort or die. Stand the pot in a wide saucer or tray of water up to 2.5 cm deep (less in winter). It is preferable to use rain or distilled water. If using tap water it is necessary to rinse the soil and water tray every month or sp to prevent a build up of salts.

## Dormancy Period

Sarracenias require a dormancy period, in autumn growth almost stops and leaves no longer develop, the plant will rest until it can see a rapid increase in daylight hour. During this time watering may be reduced but should not dry out. Winter temperatures of 10 degrees or lower are required for dormancy to occur. The plants are best left outside during winter. Artificial lighting or heating should be avoided. Leaves will die off over the winter period, with the upright growing plants losing their leaves over this period. The brown leaves may be pruned to allow better air circulation and improve appearance. Do not prune the live portions of the leaves as the plant will utilize the nutrients from these during the dormancy period.

## Repotting

Sarracenias cannot be grown in soils or regular potting mixes, the most popular media is a mixture of peat moss (60%) and propagating (coarse) sand (40%), sphagnum moss is also used by some growers. The media must not contain material that will decompose. Plants may be repotted from July to December. The best period is before growth starts otherwise some damage will occur. Sarracenia obtain their own fertilizers by catching insects, a supplementary liquid Fertiliser will also help from September to March but should not be used at more than 10% of recommended rate.

## Pests & Diseases

Sarracenias suffer from very few diseases but may rot if grown under adverse conditions. Insect pests like scale, mealy bug and aphids can distort growth and weaken the plant. Manual removal of aphids and scale may be sufficient but there are several insecticides available which may be applied manufacturer's instructions, and use with care.


Sarracenia leucophylla hybrid

**Good Growing!**

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Sarracenia flower