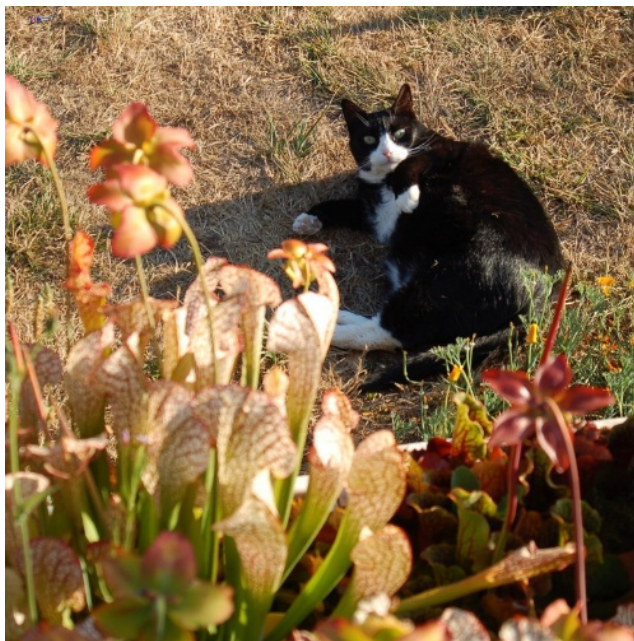


THE ULTIMATE CARNIVOROUS PLANT GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

**How to Keep Your First Carnivorous Plant
Alive and Healthy**



JACOB FARIN



Jasper, our beloved nursery cat of 19 years. She enjoyed belly rubs, greeting customers, and eating hot dogs. What a kook she was!

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Alive and Healthy

By Jacob Farin





Special thanks to **Jeff Dallas** for introducing me to a fantastic hobby that grew into a new career. And much more.

Great appreciation also extended to Carson Trexler, Susan Sendelbach, and Djoni Crawford for their support and guidance through this project.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacob Farin is co-owner of **Sarracenia Northwest**, a carnivorous plant nursery founded by Jeff Dallas in 1995. Jacob joined Jeff in 1998 and eventually took over operations in 2004. Together, Jeff and Jacob produce thousands of carnivorous plants every year to the delight of customers throughout the United States.

Jacob has starred in many YouTube videos, such as "Carnivorous Plant Care for October 2010," "Bathtub Carnivores," and "Victor Flytrap." He also has degrees in music and the health sciences, so he is often found in the greenhouse conducting experiments on sundews, testing their response to his flute playing of Bohemian Rhapsody.



Although Jacob is really good at growing carnivorous plants, he sucks at 8-ball pool as evident by his uncontrollable expletive language whenever he misses a shot. Because of his direct language, Jeff banned him from vending at farmers' markets unsupervised. Other than that, Jacob is a pretty nice guy.

Some things people have said about Jacob:

- "Harmlessly irreverent." - Longtime friend from college
- "My cat likes him." - Pool buddy who kicks his butt
- "That dork ate all my cookies!" - Former roommate
- "Yeah, I like bread." - Some guy on Facebook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF CARNIVOROUS PLANTS | 16 |
| • TYPES OF CARNIVOROUS PLANTS | 17 |
| • INSECT CAPTURE | 24 |
| • UNDERSTANDING BOTANICAL NAMES | 29 |
| THE ESSENTIALS OF PLANT GROWTH | 37 |
| • BUGS AND CARNIVOROUS PLANTS | 38 |
| • SUNLIGHT | 40 |
| • WATER | 46 |
| • SOIL | 52 |
| • POTS | 59 |
| • TEMPERATURE | 61 |
| • HUMIDITY AND TERRARIUMS | 63 |
| • SELECTING YOUR CARNIVOROUS PLANTS | 67 |
| HOW TO GROW COLD HARDY PLANTS | 69 |
| • VENUS FLYTRAPS | 71 |
| • COLD HARDY SUNDEWS | 83 |
| • <i>SARRACENIA</i> | 91 |
| • THE PURPOSE OF WINTER DORMANCY | 115 |
| • WINTER CARE | 117 |
| • WHEN WINTER CARE GOES WRONG | 126 |
| HOW TO GROW TROPICAL PLANTS | 130 |
| • TROPICAL SUNDEWS | 132 |
| • <i>NEPENTHES</i> | 142 |
| • ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS | 159 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| HOW TO CONTROL PLANT PESTS | 166 |
| • COMMON PLANT PESTS | 167 |
| • SLUGS | 175 |
| • FOUR AND TWO-LEGGED PESTS | 177 |
| • MOSQUITOES | 179 |
| • HOUSE PESTS | 181 |
| AND BEYOND | 183 |
| • FINAL THOUGHTS | 184 |

INTRODUCTION

I was 19 years old, a student in college and living away from home when I saw my first carnivorous plant, a Venus flytrap. The local grocery store had them for sale in a colorful, eye-catching display in the produce section, next to the bin of apples. I stared at these plants in horrid fascination. I heard about them, plants that eat insects, but I had never seen one before. Their green traps stretched out from their pots like a nest of newly hatched birds, all wanting a taste of sweet, regurgitated morsels!

“Should I buy one?” I asked myself. “Yes, I should!” The fluorescent lights from above hummed in approval. I selected one and placed it in my grocery basket amongst the packs of dried ramen noodles, bananas, and a jar of peanut butter.

When I got home, I showed off my new Venus flytrap to my roommate, and he was just as fascinated as I was. The plant got a revered place on our television in the living room. We fed it bits of hamburger, rice, chicken nuggets, scrambled eggs, and avocado.

Day by day, however, the traps stopped working, its leaves turned black, and, alas, my beloved Venus flytrap was no more. But, why? Was it the avocado?

Perhaps you had a similar experience; you purchased a flytrap and watched it die shortly after bringing it home. Depending on your temperament, you either needed months of therapy, or you thought flytraps were too finicky to be bothered with. You may have also told your friends how difficult it was to keep your plant alive.

Even the best gardeners have trouble keeping a flytrap alive. I've given presentations to horticultural experts and Master Gardeners who have no clue of the necessary growing conditions for flytraps and other carnivorous plants. I've also met so-called garden experts who told me that flytraps are just too hard to grow. They could barely keep one alive for a few months.

I don't blame them. Carnivorous plants have a bad rap. When you think about carnivorous plants, you most likely think of something like this:



A sculpture at Sarracenia Northwest.

Of course, movies like *Little Shop of Horrors* immortalized the idea that carnivorous plants are animal-like, which is why when most people think about carnivorous plants, they imagine something that looks like a lizard sticking out of the ground.

(As a side note, if you see someone selling carnivorous plants at a farmers' market, you can safely assume that person has seen or at least heard of *Little Shop of Horrors*. So it's not at all necessary to ask them if they did. Seriously, don't ask them that question. Please.)

I'll admit that I wasn't interested in plants before I got involved with carnivorous plants. After college, I had numerous houseplants that perished under my care. I've also killed many azaleas, periwinkle, geraniums, and other easy-to-grow plants, so my interest in plants was minimal. But carnivorous plants had a different impression on me. Apart from their bug-catching abilities, I was fascinated with the plants' appearance. Their leaves were very unusual; I could barely comprehend how Nature could design such plants.



Carnivorous plants come in many shapes, sizes, and colors. *Sarracenia* (left), *Drosera* (center), *Nepenthes* (right).

But why do people think carnivorous plants are hard to grow? When my interest in carnivorous plants started, this was the general growing information I could find:

TROPICAL FOLIAGE

- **Light:** Provide bright indirect light.
- **Water:** Keep soil moist.
- **Humidity:** Provide humid conditions
- **Temperature:** Keep at 60°-80°F (15°-27°C). Avoid freezing temperatures.

It didn't matter if it was a Venus flytrap, a pitcher plant, or a sundew; the general information was all the same. This was in the 1990s when cultivating carnivorous plants as a mainstream hobby was in its infancy. But even today, finding reliable information can be difficult. Many people can voice their opinions in forums and social media regardless of their experience, and the anecdotes of hobbyists often contradict each other, making it challenging to find reliable information.

So, why listen to me? I could be just another guy giving my armchair advice, right?

I'm co-owner of Sarracenia Northwest, a nursery specializing in carnivorous plants, founded by Jeff Dallas in 1995. Since 2004, when I took over operations, Jeff and I have grown and propagated thousands of carnivorous plants every year. We've also taught tens of thousands of growers how to grow carnivorous plants. In 2009, we produced the video series, *Grow Carnivorous Plants!*, a three-volume set with over 6 hours of video instruction. In those videos, we demonstrate the same growing and propagation methods we use at the nursery. To be blunt, we have to get our information right. Our customers rely on it.

We also practice what we preach. We don't grow plants in terrariums. We grow plants in the same way we tell our customers to grow them, and we use a common sense approach that is simple and easy to follow. We also produce numerous YouTube videos so that customers can see how our plants appear throughout the year.

The one thing that positively helped me become successful growing carnivorous plants was understanding that carnivorous plants are *plants*. They are not animals. They are not pets. They are not lizards sticking out of the ground that will rid your home of pesky flies forever. Carnivorous plants are plants.

Animals are different from plants in how they acquire energy. Animals obtain energy by eating food, such as meats and vegetables. These foods contain proteins and starches, which are then transformed into energy. In short, food is fuel for animals.

Plants, on the other hand, generate their own energy through photosynthesis. They use sunlight to convert carbon dioxide and water into sugars and starches. All plants, carnivorous or not, need sunlight to survive. Sunlight is fuel for plants, and depriving plants of abundant sunlight starves them.

Now, the difference between normal plants and carnivorous plants is how they get their fertilizer. What is fertilizer? Think of fertilizer as a vitamin supplement for plants. It enhances plant growth, but it's not a replacement for sunlight, which is their sole source of energy.

Regular plants, such as daisies, rose bushes, and herbs, absorb fertilizer through their roots. This is why they grow best when the soil is rich in nutrients. Carnivorous plants, on the other hand, absorb fertilizer through their leaves. They live in nutrient-poor soil, so they obtain particular nutrients from bugs that they capture. Bugs are nothing more than little packets of fertilizer.

✓ IMPORTANT CONCEPT

Carnivorous plants are plants, plain and simple. The extent to which you understand this fundamental concept will determine the degree of your success in growing carnivorous plants. Sunlight, water, and soil, not bugs, are critical to the day-to-day survival of carnivorous plants. Without ample sunlight, water, and soil, no amount of bugs you give your carnivorous plant will make it thrive. This concept is so important, I'm going to state it as directly as possible.

- ✓ Carnivorous plants are plants.
- ✓ Carnivorous plants need ample sunlight to survive.
- ✓ Bugs are only a source of fertilizer for carnivorous plants.

Understanding this concept is extremely important to your success. When you embrace the idea that carnivorous plants are plants, you will be able to identify the optimal growing conditions for carnivorous plants and how to choose appropriate plants for a specific growing location.

This concept has helped me become an owner of a flourishing carnivorous plant nursery. Jeff and I grow and sell carnivorous plants for a living and have thousands upon thousands of customers who are more than satisfied with the quality of the plants we offer and the quality of our care guides.



Erric Jones of Portland, Oregon, has been a customer since 1999. In 2012, he created a spectacular water feature to display his *Sarracenia*. His *Nepenthes* collection is just as impressive! Stay tuned!

THE PURPOSE OF THIS EBOOK

To prevent unfulfilled expectations, here is what this e-book is NOT:

- This e-book is NOT a technical document on every single species of carnivorous plants. Instead, this e-book will teach you how to grow the most common carnivorous plants found in cultivation, specifically Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, and sundews. When you're able to grow these three successfully, you will have the skills to grow almost all types of carnivorous plants found throughout the world. For this reason, it is not at all necessary to cover every single species.
- This e-book is NOT the gospel of cultivating carnivorous plants. Other growers have their preferences. The ones that we share with you have provided the highest degree of success among our customers, which is how we set our standard.
- This e-book will NOT cover propagation techniques. Propagating carnivorous plants can be exciting, but it won't matter much if you don't know how to keep plants alive long enough to propagate them. I want you to learn the basics of growing carnivorous plants.

This e-book intends to:

- Dispel the common myths you may have read or heard elsewhere.
- Give you clear growing instructions backed by a heavy dose of common sense.
- Prevent unnecessary plant loss.
- Stimulate thoughtful discussions about cultivating carnivorous plants.
- Supplement the literary classics on carnivorous plants with a fresh perspective.

This ebook is divided into three main sections. The first section covers the nuts and bolts of carnivorous plants - the various types, how they capture insects, and how they are named.

The second section discusses the essentials of plant growth. You will learn the type of sunlight, water, and soil carnivorous plants require, as well as the type of temperature and humidity they can grow in.

In the third section, you will learn the specifics on how to successfully grow the most common carnivorous plants in cultivation, plants that are easy to grow, easily obtained, relatively inexpensive, and forgiving of mistakes. These include:

- Venus Flytraps
- *Sarracenia* (North American pitcher plants)
- Sundews (cold hardy and tropical)
- Common varieties of *Nepenthes* (tropical Asian pitcher plants).

For each group of plants you will learn how to provide the right sunlight, water, and soil. In the case of cold hardy plants, you will also learn about winter care. Each section also includes instructions on how to troubleshoot common plant problems. The growing section will then conclude with common plant pests and how to treat them.

When you become familiar with the growing habits of plants discussed in this ebook, you can apply your new skills to growing many other carnivorous plants found in cultivation.

If you already consider yourself a plant lover, you might find growing carnivorous plants very easy and natural. If you have an outdoor garden and successfully grow roses, herbs, or vegetables, you can grow Venus flytraps and many other cold hardy specimens. If you successfully grow houseplants or orchids, you can grow sundews and many other tropical carnivorous plants.

Maybe you're new to growing plants in general. Or perhaps you're a self-proclaimed black thumb and you've struggled to keep plants alive. Not to worry. The information in this ebook will give you a fresh perspective about plants and guide you through the process of growing Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, and sundews successfully. Over time, you will have a beautiful collection of carnivorous plants you can be proud of.



This bathtub garden of *Sarracenia*, sundews, and flytraps makes an impressive display, especially in spring when plants are in bloom. (Rubber ducky approves!)