

Nepenthes species – Pitcher Plants

In their natural habitat on the eastern coast of Madagascar, tropical Pitcher Plants usually grow as vines, climbing all over other plants, sometimes up in the forest canopy as epiphytes or even as little clumping shrubs reaching up to 1m high. The Pitcher Plant forms a rosette habit, the leaves are long and lance shaped, at the ends a tendril forms, these tendrils are used to support it as it climbs then the trap itself forms from this, growing to full size over several weeks.

The Pitcher lid opens up to reveal digestive fluids at the bottom of the traps, prey is attracted by the bright colours and the intoxicating nectar produced under the lid and around the rim, it has a smooth lining and the insects and small animals can't grip onto this slippery surface and fall into it, quickly losing their footing and slipping into the nectar at the bottom.

The lower part of the trap is covered in digestive glands which quickly dissolve the soft parts of the prey and the remaining parts drop into the bottom of the Pitcher Plant.

This carnivorous lifestyle is how the plants supplement their intake of nitrogen and other nutrients.

This plant is naturally found growing in sandy bogs or flooded areas and prefers high humidity climates.

Grow in a mix of equal parts of peat moss, perlite, vermiculite and sphagnum moss, keep warm and moist but not stagnant and wet.

This is an interesting plant that is suitable to a wide range of conditions in Australia.

Propagation

There are a few options for propagation, read the ones listed below and choose one that best suits your needs.

Start Nepenthes seeds in containers filled with chopped live sphagnum moss, being sure to keep it damp but not too wet. Keep an eye on the sphagnum moss as it may start to overgrow the seeds, if this happens just pull it away using tweezers.

Usually though you would use dried long fibred sphagnum moss so rehydrate this with boiling water – this will help kill any contaminants in the moss – but only do this quickly as if it overcooks it can break down and mould may become an issue.

Coir fibre can be used as an alternative to sphagnum moss on its own or adding washed perlite to it and keeping this moist but not too wet.

Sprinkle the seeds onto the surface of the media and spray with rainwater, optimum temperatures are 26°C to 32°C so using a greenhouse or covering pots with plastic bags to increase humidity and temperatures is recommended.

Keep the pots out of direct sunlight or grow lights.

Germination can start in 4 weeks but can take as long as a year.

Fertilise with a high nitrogen fertiliser once plants are about 6 months old, this will encourage the seedlings to green up and grow faster.

This is a long term commitment but well worth the end result!



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