

lifestyle: GARDENING SPECIAL

SERIAL Killer Plants



The Lowcountry's carnivorous vegetation

An army of silent killers stalks the shadowy woods and wetlands of the Lowcountry. Laying completely camouflaged in plain sight, they wait with unbelievable patience for hapless prey to stumble into their traps. Then, with swiftness belied by their innocuous appearance, they strike. For many an unlucky insect, some of the Lowcountry's predatory plants may be the last thing they ever see.

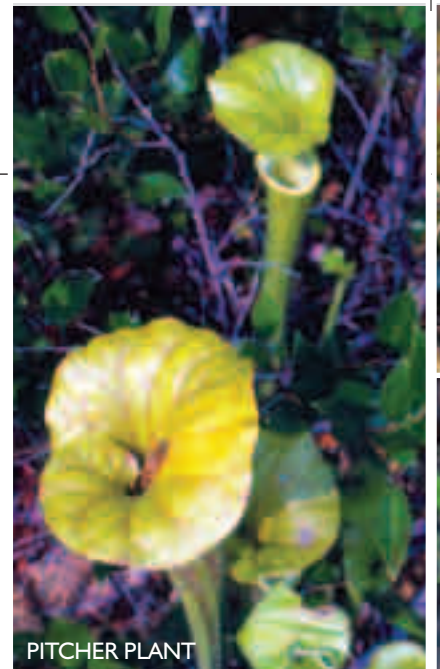
These singular plants are carnivores, meat eaters who harvest insects for sustenance, while gleaning water and minerals from the very earth to which they are anchored. Representing the flawless design of millennia of adaptation, these carnivorous plants grow in wetland bogs and swamps.

Such vegetative carnivores pop up along the coastal plains of the Lowcountry in the persons of the Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*), the sundew (*drosera*) and yellow pitcher plant (*Sarracenia flava*), using their specially modified leaves for closing ranks on their prey.

Venus flytraps ensnare their victims by the quick growth of one-half of their leaf lobes. This growth is set off by an electrical impulse in response to the prey's presence on the target lobe. Each lobe is equipped with teeth that close together on each side of the prey.

The inner leaves are equipped with cilia, hairs, which are triggered by the tiny footsteps of flies. The triggers result in the lobes closing upon the flies in 20 seconds or less (sometimes immediately). It requires a great amount of energy for the plant to close its lobes, so if excessive prey are captured at the same time, the traps may not reopen for 1-2 weeks. Sometimes traps may begin to decay if they prove too large and don't reopen for a long time. Otherwise, each individual trap on the plant may snap up different flies 3-4 times before the traps cease to function. Flies are attracted to the redness and nectar on the insides of each leaf. Once they enter, the prey is folded into the leaf and slowly digested. The plant produces several juices for disintegrating captured prey, in about ten days.

Sundews feature leaves equipped with tiny tentacles tipped with sticky mucilage, which makes each plant glow when the sun shines. The glow and odor of the mucilage attracts the hungry insect, who becomes trapped



PITCHER PLANT

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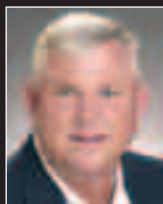
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