

CARNIVOROUS PLANTS



People often eat parts of plants. Other animals are also plant-eaters—grubs, fish and birds. Many animals eat plants at some time. It can be a dangerous world for plants. It seems strange that a small group of plants eat animals! Not big animals, but small insects. Insects are still animals.

These odd little plants often grow in damp, swampy places, where the soil is deficient in nutrients. They add goodness to their diet by 'eating' insects. They don't have teeth but dissolve the insects in special juices, in the same way our stomachs dissolve our food.

How do these plants catch their insects?



The Venus Flytrap has leaves that are about 1 cm long and have a hinge in the middle. They open like the jaws of an animal. The careless insect crawls over

the leaf and brushes against hairs on the leaf. These hairs act like triggers. The two parts of the leaf then snap shut, trapping the insect. The trap stays shut for several days, long enough to turn the soft body of the insect into a liquid that can be absorbed.

The trap of the pretty little Sundew is different. The leaf is about the size of a shirt button. Short, sticky, red hairs grow on the leaf. Tiny drops on the hairs

look like small dewdrops. When an inquisitive insect lands on the leaf, it gets stuck on the hairs. As the insect struggles to escape, other hairs close over it and the plant dissolves the soft parts of the insect. Then the hairs unfold and the wind blows away what is left.

The Pitcher Plant is a vine that grows on trees in tropical forests. Its leaves are about 10 cm long. They are shaped like long vases or tall jugs—or pitchers. Inside the pitcher is sweet-smelling nectar. Curious, hungry insects land on top of the pitcher and start crawling down the hairs to the water. The hairs all point down, making it difficult for the insect to return to the top. Suddenly there are no hairs at all and the insect slips into the pool of juice at the bottom of the pitcher to be drowned and dissolved.



The Bladderwort floats in marshy ponds. It has no roots but does have a few feathery leaves hiding small traps shaped like miniature marble bags. Little insects hide in the feathery leaves but when they touch a trap door it opens inwards and the insect swims through—into the trap. The door closes and cannot be pushed open. The small creature becomes plant food. It can be a dangerous world for insects!