

Dionaea muscipula

Venus' Flytrap



Venus' Flytrap—'Lips and Lashes'

Photo- Phil Wilson

The Venus' Flytrap is in many ways the ubiquitous carnivorous plant and often is the first example that many growers try out. The plant is a native of a very small area of boggy ground in North Carolina and is highly endangered in its native habitat due to a combination of over collection and habitat loss. These days they are produced in huge quantities commercially with zero impact on native populations.

The plant has traps which are modified leaves and are a very effective trap closing in fractions of a second on unsuspecting prey.

There are trigger hairs on the inside of the trap. To operate the trap one or more of these hairs needs to be touched within a period of about five seconds. Each trap can only operate three or four times before it becomes ineffective and for this reason the temptation to trip the traps should be avoided as much as possible since this can weaken the plant.

Cultivation is relatively uncomplicated and can be grown in a variety of different composts but the best is probably a mix of peat with per-

lite and lime-free sand in about equal parts by volume. Coir may be a potential alternative or part substitute to peat for *Dionaea*, and has been used successfully by some growers (see "Growing without Peat" Care Sheet). The aim should be to have a moisture retentive but open medium.

Watering should be by the tray system. Plants should be allowed to stand in a few centimetres of water during the growing season. In winter the plants enter a state of dormancy and watering should be reduced, keeping the compost only slightly damp. If this procedure is not followed there is a chance of the rhizome rotting. Grow in full sunlight and allow to cool in the winter. New growers often make the mistake of thinking that these are tender tropical plants and try to keep them growing all year round. The plants actually need the winter rest and often they will be killed by too much kindness! The plants will actually take quite a bit of frost but for the new grower it is better to err slightly on the safe side and keep barely frost free.

There can be considerable variation in the colour, size and form of the traps and many different clones of the same plant can be found. Some plants have traps that have moderate red colour inside, others that have intense red colour on the inside the trap. Other forms have traps and leaves that are intensely red all over. Variations in the trap size can also be found (small, large and giant!) and other variants have reduced outer teeth (shark's tooth) or teeth that have fused together.



Venus' Flytrap—'Royal Red'

A Form with Completely Red Traps and Leaves

Photo— Phil Wilson