

Heliamphora

The Sun Pitcher

The genus *Heliamphora* is found mostly in Venezuela and neighbouring countries growing on large flat topped mountains called Tepui. These are the so called 'lost worlds' in the novel by Arthur Conan-Doyle. They are unique habitats physically and botanically isolated from the surrounding area for millennia and every Tepui has developed its own unique flora and fauna.

Heliamphora are distantly related to *Sarracenia* and the trapping mechanism reflects this though their cultivation requirements are significantly different. There are a number of different species and such is the isolation that these plants grow in, that new species are still being discovered. Most of the *Heliamphora* species are available from specialist growers though some of the newer or rarer specimens can command high prices. Tissue culture has increased the availability of these plants in recent years.



Heliamphora exappendiculata

Photo—Stewart McPherson



Heliamphora nutans

Photo—Tim Bailey

Sun Pitchers grow best in an open and free-draining compost such as one of equal parts by volume sphagnum peat and perlite. Coir may be a potential alternative or part substitute to peat for *Darlingtonia*, but as yet is unproven (see "Growing without Peat" Care Sheet). Good results can also be achieved using pure live sphagnum, but care should be taken that it doesn't become too compressed or water-logged.

Two types of watering appear to work equally well; either by the tray system where the pots stand in a few centimetres of water, or by regular watering like any other house plant and not allowing the pots to stand in water.

Plants should also be watered from above to enable the pitchers to fill with water. High humidity levels should be maintained at all times making Sun Pitchers ideal subjects for an indoor terrarium or humid glasshouse. Regular misting may be necessary if the humidity in a glasshouse is not high enough.

Plants produce two type of pitcher. Immature plants and smaller offsets on mature plants produce small pitchers with a covered hood. The larger and more spectacular pitchers are only produced on mature plants and they vary considerably in both size and colour from species to species. In addition certain species and forms have hairs covering the outer or inner surfaces of the mature pitchers.

All sun pitchers will survive at temperatures as low as 5°C but a winter minimum of 10°C is advisable. Unusually for carnivorous plants Sun Pitchers can be fed with fertiliser. A ¼ strength foliar feed once or twice a week during the growing season can be beneficial.