Nepenthes

Tropical or Monkey Cup Pitcher Plant

As one of the common names implies, this genus can be found in the tropical regions of the world and specifically the Pacific basin comprising roughly of SE Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Northern Australia and Madagascar. One of the keys to successful cultivation is an understanding of the individual species requirements. Plants can occur at a variety of altitudes with certain species occupying specific niche climates. For cultivation purposes species can be split into Highland and Lowland types though some species are a lot more particular in their specific needs than others. Generally plants from lowland areas need higher temperatures and humidity whereas plants coming from higher altitudes require high humidity in conjunction with lower temperatures and in particular, a drop in the night time temperature.

Nepenthes robertcantleyi

Photo—Phil Wilson

The main requirements for successful cultivation are high humidity, regular watering, bright indirect light and the correct temperature range. Highland species can be allowed a minimum of 10° C but must not become too hot during the summer months with a maximum of 28° C being preferable. Lowland species require a minimum of 15° C all year so adequate heating must be provided. Bear in mind that these are generalisations though and some species are a lot tougher (i.e. less fussy) than others!

Compost mixes for *Nepenthes* should be open and free draining. They can be complex mixtures of sphagnum moss, perlite, orchid bark, coarse peat or coir (see "Growing without Peat "Care Sheet) and horticultural charcoal or more simple mixes such as of live or dead sphagnum moss and perlite or orchid bark and coir. Watering should aim to keep your plants moist throughout the year, but they should not be left standing in water. There is no winter dormancy though growth may slow during the short day length of winter unless artificial lighting is supplied.

Unlike many carnivorous plants, *Nepenthes* can be fed with low strength fertiliser. A ¼ strength foliar feed once or twice a week during the growing season can be beneficial.

Young plants and several of the smaller growing species including *N. ampullaria, N. gracilis* and *N. bellii* do well in enclosed terrariums. However, most species will quickly outgrow these conditions and some can get to a very large size so are best grown in a heated humid glasshouse or conservatory. Some of the hardier Highland species and hybrids can grow well on a cool humid windowsill.

Propagation can be from seed though this tends to be short-lived so needs to be as fresh as possible, or from cuttings. Cuttings can be taken at virtually any time but it's usually more practical to do so in the spring when the plants are growing strongly. Root in live sphagnum and cover with a plastic bag or propagating dome and keep out of direct sunlight. Seed can be sown onto the surface of a pot filled with a standard mix with orchid seedling bark. Cover and keep out of direct sunlight. Seed grown plants can take many years to reach maturity but will respond well to a regular spray with a dilute foliar feed.

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