

# FLOWERING INDOOR PLANTS



You can enjoy the beauty of flowers in bloom inside your house just about all year-round. **These 10 plants will flower indoors without the need for grow lights or other special equipment.** They are generally inexpensive to buy and thrive with only moderate amount of attention. They all fare well in normal home temperatures, though some may need to have the humidity level raised around them. All of them are sure to delight you and others with their vibrant natural colors.

## African Violets

These old-time favorites bloom continuously with petite blossoms that come in shades of purple, pink, and white, solid and patterned. In the right conditions, African violets can live for many years.

**Light:** Give them bright, but indirect light, like in a north- or east-facing window. Rotate the pots once a week so all of the leaves get plenty of light. African violets bloom more vigorously in winter if you give them supplemental light.

**Container:** The roots grow outward more than downward, so wide, shallow pots work best. Look for designs that allows them to soak up water from the bottom. Just beware of letting the plant sit in water, which causes root rot.

**Care:** Feed African violets with an organic liquid fertilizer twice a month from spring to fall. Remove spent flowers and leaves to keep them from harboring destructive fungi. Every couple of years, replot the plants with fresh soil mix.

## Anthurium

Commonly called flamingo lily or painter's palette, anthurium opens its bright red, waxy blooms throughout the year and they last for weeks. The heart-shaped, dark green leaves form a clump that reaches up to 16 inches tall.

**Light:** Bright light is essential for anthurium to bloom, but full, direct sunlight can scorch it. You can bring this native of the tropics outside in the summer, but make sure it gets afternoon shade.

**Container:** Light plastic pots make it easy to move anthuriums around. If you like a more attractive look, set the plastic container inside a slightly larger ceramic pot.

**Care:** Water anthuriums well and then allow the top couple inches of soil to dry out before watering again. Overwatering causes yellow leaf tips and under-watering causes brown leaf tips. As anthuriums age, they begin to form an elongated stem with visible root nubs. Wrap these stems with moist sphagnum moss and a loose layer of plastic over the moss to retain moisture. Keep the moss

moist and the roots will grow into it. When a clump of new roots has formed, cut off the stem at soil level and put the new roots into their own pot.

## Cape Primrose

An evergreen perennial known botanically as streptocarpus, cape primrose has tall stems that carry clusters of trumpet-shaped blooms in shades of purple, violet-blue, pink, red, lavender, white and bicolors. The foliage is long and drooping, and velvety to touch.

**Light:** Cape primrose blooms best when it gets bright, indirect sunlight. Like African violets (*a relative*), giving them artificial light in winter keeps the flowers coming.

**Container:** Self-watering containers are not ideal for cape primrose because the plants rot quickly when soggy. For most specimens, 2- or 3- inch plastic pots work well.

**Care:** Feed streptocarpus every other week in spring and summer with organic African violet fertilizer is ideal. Use fertilizer when the soil is already moist to avoid nutrient burn.

## Christmas Cactus

You hardly have to pay any attention to Christmas cactus and it will bloom faithfully every season. It has long, fleshy stems divided into leaf-like segments with scalloped margins but no prickly spines. The stems start growing upward, then droop down over the side of the pot. Trumpet-shaped flowers in different pink hues form at the tips of the stems.

**Light:** Bright, indirect light will get Christmas cactus to bloom in early winter.

**Container:** Terra cotta pots look good with Christmas cactus and drain well enough for the plants that prefer dry soil.

**Care:** Repot Christmas cactus plants every other year to refresh the soil. Keep the same size pot unless the root ball has no more room to spread out.



# FLOWERING INDOOR PLANTS *continued*

## Clivia

Kaffir lily, or clivia, grows from tuberous roots (*like bulbs*) that put out dark green strap-like foliage, followed by clusters of orange, salmon, red, or yellow flowers. With a little care, clivia can last and continue blooming for years.

**Light:** Direct sunlight in an east- or south-facing window is conducive to good growth for clivia.

**Container:** Clivia are large plants that fare best in tight spaces. They can start out in 6-inch pots, then move up to 8- or 10-inch containers as they mature.

**Care:** During late fall and early winter, clivia plants need a dormant period. Place them in a cool spot, ideally where temperatures stay around 50 degrees Fahrenheit, such as in a basement or garage. In mid-January, bring clivias back into the light, give them a thorough soaking with water and they will soon sprout new center leaves. When growth starts, give plants a weekly feeding with liquid organic plant food.

## Cyclamen

Petite, fragrant cyclamen plants make perfect decorations for coffee tables and dining room centerpieces. The pink, lilac, red, or white blooms open above heart-shaped leaves, with new flowers appearing for months on end. It is a tuberous perennial, meaning it dies down to its thick roots (*tubers*) during its summer dormancy period and then regrows quickly each fall. Its flowers come in shades of pink, purple, red, and white. And its heart-shaped leaves are a medium green, often with silver marbling.

**Light:** Give cyclamen bright, indirect light in the winter, when the plant is actively growing. In the summer, when the plant is dormant, keep cyclamen in a cool, dark spot with good air circulation.

**Container:** A large, wide-based, clay pot that won't tip over is ideal for clivia. It prefers to be kept rootbound and can remain in the same pot for as long as five years.

**Care:** To encourage reblooming during its growth period, snip dead flower stalks off at the base. Then, as blooming slows, gradually allow the plant to dry out for two to three months.

## Wax Plant

**Hoya Carnosa, sometimes sold as porcelain flower,** has long slender vines covered with waxy, deep green leathery

leaves that may be flecked with silver or creamy white. The small, pink and white flowers open in parachute-shaped clusters in spring and summer. They have a sweet fragrance and may produce a sticky sap.

**Light:** Bright, indirect sunlight is best, but keep it out of direct sunlight to prevent the leaves from scorching. Wax plant fares well in east- or north-facing windows, where the light is minimal during the winter.

**Container:** Wax plant does not need regular repotting so you can grow it in any container that has good drainage. Glazed ceramic planters are a popular look.

**Care:** From spring to fall, when the plant is actively growing, water it whenever the top inch or two of the soil is dry. In winter, water at most once or twice a month. Likewise, during the growing season, fertilize wax plant with a liquid organic fertilizer every other week, but stop feeding in winter.

## Kalanchoe

Kalanchoe is a succulent with dark green, thick waxy leaves that have scalloped edges. In spring, and again during the growing season, it blooms in clusters of small, four-petaled flowers in various shades of red, magenta, pink, orange, yellow, and white. You can choose from many varieties, including hybrids with as many as 26 petals per bloom.

**Light:** Kalanchoe plants need a lot of sunlight to bloom, so keep them in a bright room. However, don't place them on windowsills or in direct sunlight, where they can be burned.

**Container:** Clay pots help wick excess water from the soil, so the roots don't stay soggy.

**Care:** Kalanchoe does well with minimal water, requiring a complete saturation only every few weeks or so (*and even less often during the winter months*). Let the soil of your Kalanchoe dry out completely, then water to the point of saturation. Feed once a month during the spring and summer months with a liquid fertilizer blend that's rich in potassium to help encourage blooming. To get them to rebloom, put them in a darkened room or in a book after they finished flowering and do not feed or water them for about six weeks. When you see new buds form, you can bring them back out into the light and resume normal care.



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# FLOWERING INDOOR PLANTS *continued*

## Paper Whites

In winter and early spring, these members of the daffodil family (*Narcissus*) open clusters of small, distinctly fragrant, snow white blossoms inside your home. They are bulbs that come up with long, strappy leaves followed by the flower buds.

**Light:** For stocky (*rather than leggy*) plants, grow the bulbs in a cool room (50 to 60 degree F) and make sure they get lots of bright, indirect light. Once you see buds, move the pot into your living area. Keep the bulbs away from hot sun and heat to extend the bloom time

**Container:** Because paperwhites grow in water as well as soil, their pots don't need drainage holes. You can use just about any pot, vase, or bowl. If you want to grow them in water, keep the plants upright as they emerge by setting stones, gravel, or marbles in the bottom of the container. Only the bottom half of the bulb needs to be covered. The roots will anchor themselves by growing around and under the stones.

**Care:** Plant paperwhites in groups of 5 to 7 bulbs. Big clumps look more balanced than just two or three bulbs. Space the bulbs very closely; they should almost touch. After planting, add water to the container until it almost—but not quite—touches the bottoms of the bulbs. When the roots sprout, they will reach down into the water. Replenish water as needed.

## Peace Lily

Shiny green leaves and spoon-shaped white flowers make this hardy houseplant an attractive addition to your home. They are so popular because they are truly low maintenance, needing almost no attention, yet they last for many years.

**Light:** Peace lily thrives in low to moderate light, but they tend to bloom better with bright filtered light.

**Container:** This tropical plant grows best in a pot that is no more than one-third larger than its root ball. Repot it only when the plant's roots have completely outgrown the container.

**Care:** Peace lilies need consistently moist soil, but sitting in standing water causes the roots to rot. Whenever the top inch of soil is dry, water the plant until the overflow starts to come out of the bottom of the container. If you see the

foliage flopped over, you've let the soil get too dry. Simply water immediately and you'll see it perk up again. Peace lily leaves are large and tend to collect dust. You can put the whole plant in the shower and hose it down to keep it looking fresh.

**TIP:** Many flowering houseplants are native to the tropics and need conditions to be more humid than most homes in fall and winter. To help them stay healthy, regularly mist their leaves or set their containers on a bed of gravel and pouring water over the gravel.

**Remember to always check whether these indoor plants are toxic to pets; if so, place them where animals are not able to nibble leaves or flowers!**

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**Orchids light up your home or office with a burst of exotic beauty from the tropics.** The flowers come in fascinating shapes and vivid colors, and they open on arching branches that dramatically display them. Some orchids bloom with more than 6 at a time and in the right conditions may bloom more than once a year. You can start with one of the easy-to-care-for varieties and add more challenging types as you gain experience.

### Beginner's Picks

If you've never cared for an orchid before, choose one of these three. They're the least-demanding types, while also offering you many different shapes and colors to select from.

**Lady's slippers** (*Paphiopedilum*, commonly referred to as "paphs") bear flowers with pouch-like throats surrounded by bigger petals that may be patterned or speckled. The color options include shades of pink, reds, green, and white.

**Cattleya orchids** have tubular centers with frilly petals, typically in purple, pink, and yellow hues. They have the widest temperature and humidity tolerance of these three and the shortest bloom time.

**Moth orchids** (*Phalaenopsis*) have clusters of flower petals that look a bit like butterflies. The colors may be pink, purple, orange, yellow or white, and in various combinations and patterns.

### Buying Tips

You can pick up orchids in supermarkets, florist shops, and garden centers, but the best place to buy one is at a sale hosted by a local orchid society, such as the **Southeastern Pennsylvania Orchid Society** ([sepos.org](http://sepos.org)). You are sure to get plants that have been properly cared for, as well as help in choosing the best species for your conditions and helpful growing advice.

Wherever you buy an orchid, check to be sure the stems are slightly leathery, strong, and fairly erect. Different orchids produce different leaf shapes and textures, but all healthy orchid leaves and stems should be green, with no yellow marks or dark blemishes. Take a peek at the roots, too. They should be light green if they are dry and dark green when they are wet, and plump rather than white and shriveled.

### Healthy Conditions

**Light.** In their native tropical environment, orchids get about 12 hours of sunlight each day, year-round. Orchids raised indoors fare best in bright, south- or east-facing windows. If you don't have a suitable window location, you can grow them with cool LED lights.

**Growing media.** Soil or even potting mix are not ideal for orchids. They need air circulating around their roots and water to drain very quickly from their pots. Fir bark nuggets are the most widely used growing media for the common types of orchid, but some growers use sphagnum moss, rock wool, lava rock, or other materials.

**Humidity.** The ideal humidity level for orchids is 60 to 80 percent, much higher than the 30 percent in most homes during winter. Experienced growers set the pots on trays with gravel or a rubber grid and just enough water so it doesn't touch the plants' roots.

### Care And Maintenance

**Watering.** Orchids tolerate drought much better than they handle excess moisture. An orchid sitting in soggy growing medium will suffocate and die. Check pots once a week and allow the medium to dry out between waterings. Direct the water onto the growing medium (*not the plants' leaves*) and give it a good soaking, then let it dry again. Some media need watering every few days, others every other week.

**Feeding.** The growing mediums used for orchids have few, if any, nutrients, so regular fertilizing helps them stay vibrant and bloom abundantly. Use a liquid fertilizer formulated for orchids and other indoor blooming plants and follow the package directions carefully for diluting it with water. Excessive fertilizing can burn the plant or promote fungal diseases. Experts recommend feeding orchids every other time you water them, even when it's in bloom.



## Care And Maintenance cont.

**Repotting.** Over time, the growing medium breaks down and can become too dense for orchid roots to absorb oxygen. As the plants grow, the roots may creep out beyond the pot and new growth can unbalance the plant. For all of those reasons, repotting orchids every two to four years keeps them healthy and vigorous. Just be sure to remove them carefully from their current pot so you don't damage the roots.

Small plastic pots are best for orchids. After putting in a base of bark nuggets or other growing medium, set the plant so that the crown (where the stem meets the roots) is just a bit below the top of the pot. Fill in with more growing medium but leave a bit of room from the very top of the pot so that water doesn't spill over the sides.

**Many varieties of orchid don't bloom for six months to a year after repotting.**

## After Bloom

When the flowers on an orchid fade and the petals shrivel or drop, look at the stem on which they bloomed. If it is still green, cut it off about 1 inch above the first node below the lowest flower bloom. The plant may rebloom on a green stem. If the flower spike has turned brown, cut it off where it connects to the plant. At this point, an orchid is dormant, but not dead. It will stay this way for six to nine months. This dormancy stage is a resting period where the plant has time to replenish the resources that were used up during blooming. Continue watering and feeding it during this period.

You can move dormant orchids to a cooler area where the temperatures are **55 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit**, but they need to stay in indirect sunlight even during this resting period. Bring them back to a warm spot when new flower spikes emerge and the plants begin to open their beautiful blossoms again.

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# BEGONIA BASICS



When you say “begonias,” you’re talking about a large, diverse family of plants. It includes varieties that reach 8 feet (*or even taller!*) and others that are just a few inches high. Some bear brilliantly colored flowers, while some are prized for their lush foliage. **They are warm-climate plants that don’t survive winters in the mid-Atlantic region**, so they are grown outdoors either as annuals (*and replaced each season*) or dug up in the fall, stored and replanted in the spring. A few kinds of begonias are especially well-suited to growing indoors year-round, and they are the focus of this information.

## Plant Picks

**Cane-stemmed type.** These begonias, which include the distinctive angel wing and dragon wing varieties, grow thick, upright, cane-like stems and fibrous roots. They bear clusters of pink, white, or red flowers that cascade from the ends of stems, and they may bloom a few times throughout the year. Their leaves are large, asymmetrical, spotted or variegated, and attractive when the plant is not in bloom. Experienced indoor begonia growers recommend this type for beginners, as it tends to be more adaptable to varying light or moisture levels.

**Rex type.** The large and showy leaves are the main attraction for begonias. They come in dramatic patterns and combinations of greens, red, purple, silver, white, and more. The flowers are insignificant, so many growers simply pinch them off so they don’t detract from the foliage display, but the leaves make up for their lack of interesting blooms.

## Good Conditions

Both cane and rex type begonias grow best in bright, indirect light year-round and will be damaged by direct sunlight. Rex begonias can tolerate less light than other begonias, while many growers of angel wing and other cane begonias supplement natural light with fluorescent lights during the fall and winter.

With their long canes and big blossoms, cane begonias are well-suited to heavy ceramic or clay pots. Just be sure there are clear drainage holes in the bottom. These plants prefer to be a little root-bound, so the best pots are an inch or two larger than the root balls.

Rex begonias grow from shallow, knobby rhizomes (*sort of like a bulb*), so they do best in large, relatively shallow pots where the rhizome has room to spread. Unglazed clay or terra cotta pots allow the roots to breathe because

they are porous. Plastic pots are lighter and less breakable, but you must be especially careful to not overwater. Moss baskets are an effective and attractive choice many growers use for begonias.

**Indoor begonias fare best when temperatures stay between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit.** Be sure to keep them away from cold drafts, such as near windows in winter or air-conditioners during the summer. Cane-stemmed types are adapted to relatively high humidity, so put them bathrooms, kitchens, and other humid spaces in your home. You can also mist them regularly. While rex begonias prefer moderately high humidity, do not mist them. Lingering water droplets on the beautiful leaves can become a breeding ground for powdery mildew, an ugly fungal disease.

## Care And Maintenance

**Water.** Like all indoor houseplants, begonias cannot tolerate soggy soil. Water them thoroughly, then let the soil surface become dry to the touch before wetting it again. You can tell when begonias are too dry—the edges of their leaves begin to turn brown.

**Fertilizer.** Feed begonias with a dilute liquid organic fertilizer. Follow application instructions carefully because overfeeding leads to unhealthy, unsustainable growth and can burn plants. During blooming season (*in later winter or spring*), cane begonias benefit from high-phosphorus fertilizer to support flowering.

**Pruning.** In early winter, prune older growth from cane begonias, which prevents the plant from becoming leggy. Leave new stems alone. Throughout the year, pinch off dead flowers as soon as they appear.



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# BEGONIA BASICS



## Care And Maintenance cont.

**Repotting.** Repot indoor begonias every year or two, giving them fresh soil mix. When they begin to look cramped in their pots, put them in a slightly bigger container. Winter is the best time for repotting.

**Outdoor time.** You can move your begonias outdoors during the warm months, but be sure to put them in a spot that's mostly shaded. **Bring them in when nighttime temperatures drop back into the 50s.**

**Pest control.** If you see white powdery mildew on your begonias, mix up a tablespoon of baking soda in a quart of water and spray the leaves with the solution. Mealy bugs can show up on indoor plants in warm, humid conditions. They have oval bodies ringed with waxy filaments and distinct parallel segments. The waxy-white, slow-moving, wingless females typically feed in large, sticky colonies. Giving the plant a good shower often washes them off. If they persist, brush the pests with a cotton swab or small paint brush dipped in ordinary rubbing alcohol, which kills them on contact.

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# TERRARIUM BASICS



Terrariums let you create self-contained indoor gardens that are easy to maintain. You can set up a basic one in less than an hour with a few, relatively inexpensive materials. Terrariums can be impressive hand-crafted gifts, too.

## Plant Picks

You can choose from a wide range of plants, including small potted versions of houseplants such as croton, pothos, lucky bamboo, and creeping fig.

**Spike mosses** (*Selaginella spp.*) work as ground covers in terrariums. *S. uncinata* has metallic aquamarine foliage. The tight, chartreuse-yellow leaves of *S. kraussiana* 'Aurea' are attractive.

**Polka dot plant** (*Hypoestes phyllostachea*) adds color with its pink, red, or white-spotted leaves.

Compact and miniature ferns bring interesting textures to terrariums. Lemon button fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia* 'Duffii') and Korean rock fern (*Polystichum tsus-sense*) are especially well-suited choices.

**Compact cultivars of Begonia, Fittonia, Pilea, and Peperomia help diversify the look of a terrarium.**

## Container Choices

You can use almost any clear container or glass jar with a wide enough opening to allow you to add plants. Goldfish bowls are a popular choice. You also can use large and thoroughly cleaned Mason or pickle jars. Clear, heavy plastic containers work, too, but most people find them less attractive than glass.

Closed containers hold humidity, so they're ideal for tropical plants and others that need moist conditions. Choose open containers for cactus and other plants that need drier conditions.

## Essential Materials

To create a terrarium, you need: sheet moss; gravel, sea glass, or beach stones; activated charcoal (*found at nursery or pet stores*); and sterile potting mix without perlite or vermiculite. Tongs or cooking chopsticks can make it easier to place and adjust the plants inside the container.

## Basic Steps

1. **Start** by putting a 2-inch layer of coarse gravel, sea glass, or beach stones on the bottom of the container.
2. **Add** a quarter- to a half-inch layer of activated charcoal on top of the gravel to prevent fungi from growing on the stones when they are wet.
3. **Spread** a layer of sheet moss over the stones and charcoal to keep your next layer of potting soil from mixing in with the charcoal and stones. The moss also adds visual interest to your terrarium.
4. **Cover** the gravel and charcoal with loose, potting mix. The base layer (gravel, moss, and soil) should take up one-quarter to one-third of the container.
5. **Before planting**, take time to design the plants' arrangement in the terrarium. Set larger plants near the center, with smaller plants around it.
6. **Using** your fingers or a large spoon to dig a hole in the potting mix for each plant. Place the plants in the holes and gently pat the soil down around it. To create a pleasing, asymmetrical design, set the tallest plant toward the back or off-center and space the other plants around it.
7. **Finish** your terrarium with a layer of bark chips or colored gravel. Add small figurines, seashells, toy ships, or other appropriately sized whimsical items to personalize your minigarden.



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# TERRARIUM BASICS *continued*

## Care and Maintenance

Terrariums don't require much more than occasional watering and trimming. Every couple of weeks, feel the soil to see if it's dry and needs water. You can use a small watering can or a little cup to slowly pour water down the inside surface of the container, so that it doesn't disturb the plants. Keep the water level just below the moss layer so that the soil doesn't stay saturated.

Check closed terrariums for condensation and take off the top at least once a month to air it out. **Leave the top off until the condensation disappears.** Do this if you added too much water, as well.

Pull off yellowing or damaged leaves and prune plants if they're growing too large. Don't fertilize terrarium plants because it can stimulate excessive growth and lead to a build-up of salts in the soil.

Periodically clean the glass both inside and out. If the glass is too dirty or foggy, less light will reach your plants. Use a damp piece of newsprint or a lint-free cloth to wipe it clean. Do not use harsh cleaning products on the inside of the terrarium because the chemicals in those cleansers may harm your plants.

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# CARNIVOROUS PLANTS



Plants that consume living creatures may seem like they come from a fantasy story about a far-off place, but they are common in many places around the world. What's more, you can grow carnivorous plants inside your home to enjoy yourself and fascinate others. These species are exotically beautiful and undeniably intriguing, yet remarkably easy to care for.

## How They Eat

Plants typically produce their own food through the process of photosynthesis, in which they convert light energy into sugars, and the nutrients they absorb from soil. Carnivorous plants have adapted to living in bogs, where there is lots of moisture but little soil to provide vital nutrients. Carnivorous plants make up for the lack of soil nutrients (*especially nitrogen*) by capturing and digesting protein-rich insects and occasionally small amphibians and even mammals.

Carnivorous plants lure their prey into their traps with sweet-smelling nectar, bright colors, and tiny prickly leaf hairs. The plants break down the flesh with powerful digestive enzymes and extract the nutrients.

## Plant Picks

**Venus Flytraps** (*Dionaea muscipula*). If you've ever heard of carnivorous plants, chances are it was the Venus flytrap. It has hinged leaves shaped like an open coin purse that clamp shut over the prey, which are lured inside by a sweet-smelling nectar. The leaves are lined with teeth-like fibers that trigger an electric charge when touched, causing the leaves to close up. Each trap on the plant can only open and close several times before it dies and falls off. Then the plant produces a new trap from its underground stems. The flowers are white with green veins running from the base of the petal toward the edges.

**Pitcher Plants** (*Sarracenia spp.*). Pitcher Plants come in a variety of yellow, pink, and purple shades, but the best choice for indoor growing is purple pitcher plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*). They have upright, tubular leaves that unfurl in shades of burgundy with red veins. The external surface is waxy and feels hard to the touch. Foraging, flying, or crawling insects are attracted by the reddish color and the sweet-smelling nectar. The rim of the pitcher (*or tube*) is slippery when moistened by condensation or nectar, causing insects to fall into the trap and preventing them from climbing out. Some types of pitcher plants are hardy enough to survive winters in the mid-Atlantic region and can be grown around water gardens.

**Sundews** (*Drosera spp.*). Sundews are covered in orange, hair-like filaments that are covered in a sticky substance that both traps and digests insects. The tentacles protrude from their leaves, each with a sticky gland at the tip. These droplets look like dew glistening in the sun. Once an insect becomes stuck, nearby tentacles coil around the insect and smother it. Sundews can reach up to 10 inches tall, but many varieties grow closer to the ground. Their leaves form a small rosette that is less 1 inch in diameter. Cape Sundew (*Drosera capensis*) is often recommended for beginners because it tolerates a wide range of temperatures. It grows large and fast, and the leaves move dramatically when the plant is fed. In the right conditions, Cape Sundew will put up scores of showy pink or purple flowers on tall stems, which produce hundreds of seeds you can use to start new plants.

**Butterwort** (*Pinguicula primuliflora*). A small plant with soft yellowish-green leaves, butterwort bears pink, yellow, purple, or white flowers in spring. It looks less menacing than Venus flytraps, but it is just as deadly to insects that land on the wet-looking leaves in search of moisture. Their leaves are covered with tiny hairs that secrete a sticky liquid which look like water droplets. The fluid ensnares insects and, as they struggle, they gather more of the liquid on them. The plant responds by secreting digestive enzymes that dissolve and digest the insides of the prey.

## Good Conditions

**Light.** Carnivorous plants are adapted to growing in bogs, where there are few, if any, trees to provide shade. That means they do best in bright, sunny conditions. Full sun also brings out the red highlights that are one of the key attractions of many carnivorous plants. Windowsills that face south and west typically offer the most light for indoor plants. Tropical varieties benefit from being under artificial grow lights, such as LED fixtures, during the shorter days of winter, but those adapted to temperate climates need a dormancy period (*more on that below*).



# CARNIVOROUS PLANTS *continued*

## Good Conditions cont.

**Soil.** The bogs in which carnivorous plants grow tend to be rich in peat and sand. You can replicate these conditions with a growing medium that includes sphagnum peat moss and horticultural sand (*don't use construction-grade or beach sand*). A blend of one part peat moss with one part sand works well for most carnivorous plants. Use plastic rather than terra cotta pots to retain moisture.

**Water.** Keep the soil wet or at least damp all of the time. The easiest way to do this is by setting the pots in trays or saucers that you continually refill. Pitcher plants can grow in soggy soil with the water level in the saucer as deep as half of the pot, but most carnivorous plants prefer damp to wet soil; keep the water at about one-quarter inch and refill as soon as it is nearly gone. Water from below by adding water to the tray, rather than watering the plant, so you don't wash away the sticky substances on the plants' leaves. Use rainwater or distilled water for carnivorous plants. Tap water is too rich in minerals, which can over-fertilize the plants and cause them to burn out.

## Care and Maintenance

**Feeding.** Most carnivorous plants only need an insect or two a month. Even indoors, they are typically able to capture their own prey, but you can also provide them with insects you catch or you can pick up bloodworms from pet stores, where they're sold as fish food. When feeding your Venus flytrap, tickle the hairs a bit with a toothpick to simulate the feeling of a moving insect in order to trigger the trap to close. Despite what you may see in online videos, feeding carnivorous plants with raw meat or cheese can harm them.

**Dormancy.** Carnivorous plants that are native to temperate climates, such as pitcher plants, live healthier and longer if they get a dormancy period in winter. When they are not allowed to rest, they may exhaust their growing energy and die after a few seasons. Some types, such as the sundews, form winter buds, while Venus flytraps and pitcher plants produce winter leaves or drop their leaves. Carnivorous plants enter dormancy when winter conditions begin. When the plants begin to show signs of dormancy, water them less, leaving the soil only slightly damp. Reduce the length of daylight they get and keep them cool (55 to 65 degrees F) for about three months. Then move them back to their sunny spots and watch as they begin growing and capturing prey again.

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