



## Plants For All

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# “it's alive” Venus Fly Trap (*Dionaea muscipula*)

### Did you know?

- x Even up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some cultures viewed Carnivorous Plants as threats to man – flesh eating plants – hence the name carnivorous
- x North America has probably the widest variety of carnivorous plants in the world – pitcher plants, sundew butterworts, cobra plants, bladderworts and venus fly traps are all native to North America
- x *Normal* plants work in the following way: the leaves absorb carbon dioxide, the roots absorb water and minerals from the soil and through the process *photosynthesis* the plant is able to transform these into nutrients to give the plants the ability to grow.
- x Carnivorous plants grow in mineral deficient and often very wet environments. The water often carries away the important minerals that most plants require. Most plants could survive in this environment but could not flourish and reproduce under these conditions. Carnivorous plants make up for this lack of minerals by catching animals in their leaves and pads and absorbing from them what they would normally take up through their roots.
- x Venus Fly Traps have been hobby plants since the invention of greenhouses in the early 1800's.
- x Carnivorous plants are CITES regulated. Being protected endangered species they are now being produced in tissue culture labs and not being picked from the wild.
- x In nature they tend to grow in often sandy soil with patches of moss, often very acidic – bog type environments.
- x Their habitat is often sunny because trees cannot survive in swamp-like conditions.
- x If you choose to fertilize, use a strongly diluted solution as it would in nature – even sprayed on the plant to be absorbed through the leaves. **Plants For All/Atlantean Products Original Blend Specialty Fertilizer** with seaweed would be ideal.

### Venus Fly Traps

- First plant to be labeled carnivorous – discovered in 1763 in North Carolina and named for Venus, the Goddess of Love.

- Native only to the Coastal Plains of North and South Carolina – around the region of Wilmington.
- Plants can live up to 20 years in ideal conditions.
- Pads can reach up to 2 inches (5cm) in length.
- Flowers should be removed as they exhaust the plant.
- Venus Fly Traps do experience a natural dormancy period in winter to allow the plant to rejuvenate.
- This dormancy can be avoided if the plant receives 12 hours of light each day. When the sun goes down, supplement the natural light with an artificial light source to extend the day's length.
- The traps produce a sweet nectar to attract insects.

### **Care of Venus Fly Trap**

A growing medium of long fibred Sphagnum Moss is used with a little horticultural charcoal on the bottom. Soak peat moss well before planting. Long fibred peat moss must be kept wet.

Humidity must be high, so use a *terrarium*. Terrariums are best because while retaining humidity they also allow in lots of light. Your carnivorous plants require lots of light so place them in a south east or west window. If you are unable to provide this type of exposure, you may grow them under cool grow lights. Plants should be just inches from the lights. The cool gro-lights should be on for 18 hours during the active summer growth and for 15 hours during the winter months.

**Feeding:** Feeding is not necessary if your plants are able to catch their own insects. If this is not possible, you will have to feed your plants fresh insects, raw juicy hamburger or cooked egg whites. Do not overfeed them or the traps may die before their time. Feed not more than once every *six* weeks. Note: no plant food is necessary for Carnivorous plants.

**About the Venus Fly Trap:** The red pads are barbed with hair-like triggers called cilia. The triggers are activated on the first contact but require a second contact by the insect to close the pad. The pad, now totally closed, fills with a digestive enzyme. The insect drowns and is digested. Upon completion of digestion, the trap opens and the skeletal remains are swept away by wind and rain.

Each trap is capable of only 4 or 5 closings in its life span, so don't tease the plant. Old pads turn black and drop off. Plants bloom with white flowers in the spring and then active growth begins in spring and summer producing one trap or pad per week. Venus Fly Traps do not develop in low humidity. In low light the traps are small and lacking in red colour and the leaves tend to stretch towards the light.

**Credits:** Information for this report was supplied courtesy of Colasanti Farms Ltd., Westbrook Floral and the resources of Plants For All. Should you have any questions or comments about these products or these instructions please contact Plants For All via <mailto:plantsforall@ody.ca>