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Deadly *beautiful*

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Question: What carnivorous plants are native to Oregon? Can they be grown in the Umpqua Valley?

Answer: Oregon is home to four genera of carnivorous plants: *Drosera* (sundew), *Darlingtonia* (cobra lily), *Utricularia* (bladderwort), and *Pinguicula* (butterwort).

Unusual, beautiful, mysterious: carnivorous plants get their nutrients from meat rather than from soil. These plants evolved in wet peat bogs, where most of the nutrients they needed had been washed out of their reach. Thus, they developed several ingenious ways of getting nutrients from what was available – primarily insects.

A more proper name for carnivorous plants might be insectivores, as their traps are designed to gather insects, of which they only need one or two per month.

The sundews (genus *Drosera*) have traps consisting of mobile tentacles, each with a tip covered in hairs that exude a thick, sticky liquid that the insect mistakes for nectar. As the insect contacts the leaf, it becomes stuck in the glue, which covers the insect as it struggles. This effectively smothers it.

In some varieties, leaves curl over the insect like a jellyroll, bringing more hairs in contact with the insect. Sundews prefer the wet feet and dry shoulders they get in bogs,



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and they do develop better color in bright sunlight. Most need at least six hours of direct sunlight per day, the more the better.

Plant your sundew in soggy/boggy soil and water preferably from below. Use mineral-free water. Rainwater is best, but distilled water works too. A mix of sphagnum peat moss and horticultural sand or perlite is great.

Darlingtonia californica (commonly known as the cobra lily or pitcher plant) is native to remote montane streams and springs in Southern Oregon and Northern California. A few smaller patches grow in lowland streams along the Oregon coast, but the majority resides in the mountains. Those that are native to the mountains tend to be much more resilient to extreme temperature changes than those from the mild Oregon coast.

Cobra lilies use all the same tactics of traditional North American pitcher plants with pitfall traps (e.g. nectar, red coloration, sharp downward-pointing hairs that guide insects to their doom, and slick, waxy surfaces), but they have a few additional tricks up

their leaves.

The most distinctive cobra lily trait has to be the forked tongue dangling from the trap's mouth. This tongue secretes intoxicating nectar with the highest concentrations found where tongue meets the trap's opening – an obvious invitation to crawl inside.

Transparent blotches cover the head of the trap like tiny port holes (which also resemble scales), so when a bug gets trapped inside the bulbous hood, it becomes confused and unable to find the exit. Numerous failed attempts to escape through the false exists cause the exhausted bug to stumble and fall into the trap.

When fully grown, its pitchers can tower 3 feet tall with heads the size of fists!

Darlingtonia are finicky and one of the most challenging of all carnivorous plants to grow. It prefers well-drained soil, fresh water, moderate summers and chilly winters. *Darlingtonia* grow best outdoors as a container plant on a sunny deck or patio. You may also grow it in a pond or fountain with flowing water, but keep the crown of the plant from being submerged. Provide partial to full sun and four or more hours of direct sunlight during the growing season. *Darlingtonia* can withstand extreme heat for short periods of time.

Butterworts are the carnivorous plant equivalent of flypaper. Commonly referred to as pings from their scientific



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name *Pinguicula*, this name means little greasy one in Latin. It is derived from their broad green leaves that are covered with tiny glandular hairs that secrete sticky mucilage, greasy to the touch. These drops of mucilage cause the leaves to shimmer in light – attracting insects.

Most are relatively easy to grow, and may make great windowsill candidates.

Bladderworts, with more than 228 species, are the largest genus of carnivorous plants. In addition to being native to Oregon, bladderworts are found on almost every continent. The species are highly adaptable, surviving drought by morphing into underground rice-sized tubers, and surviving freezes by morphing into dormant, hairy buds called turions.

Bladderworts will do best in a water feature, pond or bog garden.

Your cobra lily, sundew, bladderwort or butterwort will definitely turn heads and prompt friendly questions if you keep it in an observable place. Who knew that you could get rid of some of those pesky gnats where you live, and improve the feng shui of your house all in one fell swoop?

You can purchase carnivorous plants and get more information from your local nursery.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-236-3052 or drop off samples at 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.