

79 - Carnivorous Plants

Did you know some plants eat... meat? They do! But what exactly do they eat? And why? And how do they digest them? And could they eat...a person?

Most plants get their nutrients from the sun, the air and the soil, in a process called photosynthesis. But in places where the soil is too thin or not as mineral-rich, like an acidic bog, plants have to be more creative. So they trap... animals! Usually—but not always— these animals are insects. And when those insects decompose, the plant laps up *their* nutrients. Carnivorous plants can be found on every continent... except Antarctica. And they grow on lots of Pacific Islands.

Charles Darwin discovered that a common plant found in Great Britain, the Drosera, was carnivorous, so he began to study it. He initially thought it might be a type of animal, disguised as a plant. But they are plants. The Drosera, which kind of looks like an angry dandelion, has a pale green center and red spikes with a dewy drop at the end. When an insect walks over their leaves, the sticky tentacles on the leaves bend over to trap it. Darwin tried putting all kinds of things on the leaves to see what would happen. Darwin discovered the leaves could actually tell the difference between a random substance touching them and a live animal. By knowing the difference, the plants don't waste energy trapping something that's not worth eating.

Of course, the most important question on your mind might be... can carnivorous plants eat... *people*? The answer is, no. In fact, people are much more of a danger to carnivorous plants. Between the destruction of the wetlands where Venus Fly Traps live -- and exotic plant collectors removing so many carnivorous plants from the wild -- many of these plants are in danger of going extinct.

Things You Will Learn

1. How did Darwin discover that the Drosera was carnivorous?
2. What are the different types of carnivorous plants?
3. How do carnivorous plants trap their food and digest it?

Activities

1. Carnivorous plants often pretend to be something they are not in order to catch their food. You can pretend to be something you are not too! Make a mask, dress up in a costume or get around the room by not walking -- you can skip, crawl, roll, or hop. Do you think your disguise makes you a different person or convince an adult to give you your favorite snack?
2. Most carnivorous plants eat bugs. You can have a bug snack too by making -- Ants On A Log! Ask an adult to help you put peanut butter, hummus, or cream cheese on celery, then put the "ants" on using raisins. Make sure you ask an adult about your food allergies before you start!
3. Want to know how a Venus Flytrap works? Check out [this](#) cool video from PBS!

Additional Resources

Carnivorous plants are not animals but sometimes, you can find them at the zoo! Many are endangered, which is why zoos have conservation programs for animals and plants. Check out [this](#) link to read more about carnivorous plants and how they trap their food. Be sure to click the Venus Flytrap link at the bottom to read more about a carnivorous plant that is native to North America.

Kid News

A meteorite older than Earth was found in the Sahara Desert. This 4.6 billion years old space stone is thought to be a piece of volcanic rock from a protoplanet. A protoplanet is a large, rocky body in the process of developing into a planet. It may have been destroyed or was devoured by a bigger planet. Read more about this unique discovery [here](#).¹

¹ This activity guide is for the Who Smarted? podcast www.WhoSmarted.com