

Features

7/30/2014

Bite-Sized Gardening

Jennifer Polanz



Recently Mary McKee reached out to us to recommend a unique style of compact theme garden to run in the magazine: carnivorous plants. These plants are a great way to get kids involved in gardening, but they also appeal to plant collectors looking for something different. Mary owns a store called World's Rare Plants in Half Moon Bay, California, with her husband Richard, who has been collecting these plants for more than 50 years.

She gave us some great insight into these mysterious wonders, like the fact that they originated in the bogs of South Carolina and evolved to eating bugs because they weren't getting enough nutrients. Because they are considered tropical plants, water is key. She says the bugs provide all the necessary nutrients, so no fertilizer is

necessary.

Mary has been pairing them with fairy gardens and also did a display at the Filoli Estate playing off the "Little Shop of Horrors" theme. Although she jokes that the Broadway show and movie probably did more to harm the reputation of Venus Fly Traps than help. "You wouldn't believe how many people stop by looking for the gigantic size fly trap," she says. "I like to remind them that plant was from outer space."

These cool plants don't need fantasy to make them interesting, though. For instance, carnivorous plants don't digest the entire bug; they typically leave the exoskeleton of the insect. A Venus Fly Trap will eat their prey, compress it and reopen to show a compressed exoskeleton. Neat, right?

Here are some carnivorous plants to get started:

- Cape Sundew (*Drosera*)
- Venus Fly Trap (*Dionaea muscipula*)
- Rainbow Plant (*Byblis liniflora*)
- Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia* and *Nepenthes*)
- Waterwheel plant (*Aldrovanda*) **GP**

