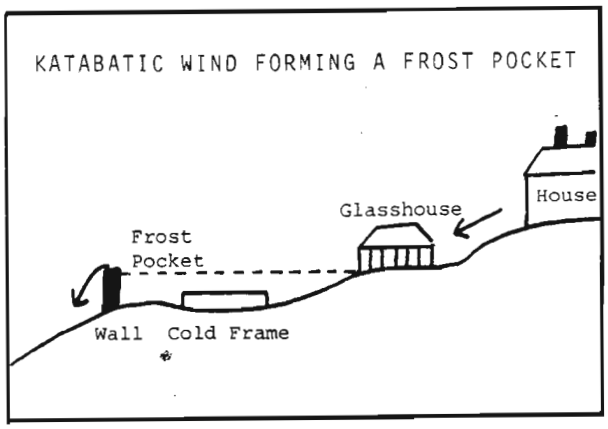

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A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE FOOD FOR CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

by Jeffrey Del Col

George Sergeant's note in Vol. V, No. 1 of CPN about feeding powdered milk to *Droseras* led me to do some thinking about other possible non-living foods for carnivorous plants. I recognize, of course, that living insects are the best food for our plants, but we must concede that live insects are a seasonal item and that indoor gardeners face special problems in feeding live insects to their plants. Probably the best live insects for home culture are the wingless or vestigial winged mutants of the common fruit fly. I formerly raised thousands of fruit flies to feed to tropical fish and am aware of the difficulties in culturing them. The cultures must be carefully maintained lest they spoil, run out of nutrient, or become contaminated by wild-type *Drosophila*. This last problem is a serious one. The wild flies quickly overwhelm the less vigorous mutants, and the person growing the flies soon has a large swarm of winged pests loose in the home.

If living insects are undesirable in the home, what other foods are suitable? Classically, raw meat and cooked egg white have been used to maintain carnivorous plants. However, proportions of these may be hard to gauge, and they must be prepared and refrigerated. My experience with tropical fish leads me to make the following proposal: we may be able to feed our plants some of the commercial freeze-dried tropical fish foods.

These foods are relatively cheap, clean, and require no care other than seeing to it that the lid of the container is kept tightly shut. An amazing variety of freeze-dried insects, worms, crustaceans and meat are available. Freeze-dried brine shrimp is the most common food, but I have purchased or seen freeze-dried daphnia, squid flakes, meal worms, mosquito larvae, beef liver and tubifex worms. All these are high protein foods with a protein content ranging from around thirty to seventy per cent protein according to the analyses printed on the containers. They can be readily portioned and even powdered for smaller plants. Because a container of these foods should last a long time, they are quite cheap over the long run.

I must emphasize that this is only a suggestion. I have done no experiments, though I plan to this summer using *D. rotundifolia*. One possible drawback to brine shrimp may be a residue of salt that could harm the plants. No sodium content was listed on the labels I have checked, so research is needed to discover how much salt is in brine shrimp and other freeze-dried foods. I hope other CP enthusiasts will be willing to try some of these foods. Only by experiment can we know if they are a convenient and beneficial food for our plants.