

DROSERA PAUCIFLORA

Queen of Sundews

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In March of 1987, I was given a pot of sundews marked *Drosera cistiflora* and *Drosera pauciflora* from a grower who received the plants from South Africa. It was obvious which of the plants was the former, as the stem was several inches high. Hugging the ground was the second plant, a rosette, which looked so much like the early rosetted stage of *D. cistiflora* pictured in Kondo's *Carnivorous Plants of the World in Color* on page 26, that I wasn't sure if it was the mysterious *pauciflora* or *cistiflora* in early growth. The grower didn't know either, and I found nothing in the literature available to me to help me out.

As the plants were growing in a small four inch pot, I removed them. I was surprised that the *pauciflora* roots were an incredible twenty-two inches in length, wrapped around and around the pot's interior, similar to other South African species like *D. capensis*, and rather thick. I cut off some of the roots, and transplanted them and the plant into a large twelve inch shallow pot, laying the roots a couple of inches under the mix of peat and sand. Then the following month the rosette shriveled and died. I rightfully assumed this South African plant had a similar growth cycle as some other winter growing sundews, dying back to its roots for a summer resting period. Since the roots were so long, it seemed to me that in the wild they probably grew deep into the moist soil where they grew, while the soil surface dried out to some extent. So I let the pot sit and kept it just damp, and kept my fingers crossed as well.

Four months went by, and then in August the first plants broke the soil surface, and I set the pot in a tray of water. I was pleased to see that it put up mature rosettes, and within six weeks I had a good dozen plants, each about three inches across, some a little larger. The leaves are pale green and strapped-shaped, semi-erect until they come to rest and hug the dead leaves below. The tentacles are also pale green, surmounted by a red gland. The marginal tentacles are among the most developed I have seen, and move with alarming speed upon prey, and the whole leaf folds over as does *D. cistiflora* and *D. capensis*. They easily catch insects as large as houseflies.

Drosera pauciflora forms a thin black wirey stem as it grows. The rosette "crawls" along the soil surface, the rosette moving several inches away from where it first broke through, and new roots anchor it to the ground from the trailing stem. Other plants suddenly appear from the extensive roots, and one finally has a cluster of spreading plants with intertwined stems and roots lying close to the soil surface.

As handsome as the rosettes are, and as interesting as the growth habit may be, it was nothing compared to the events that occurred around November of that year, four months after the plants first emerged.

It was then, during the cool winter with temperatures about 60F during the day and in the 40s at night, that the first flower scapes appeared. Each scape had between one and four buds on it, and the scape stretched to between 12 and 15 inches above the rosettes and were covered with fine sticky glands. There was one scape per plant and my anticipation grew as the first flower approached opening. From the size of the bud, I thought it would be a good sized flower about an inch across. I was in for a surprise.

On a cool morning in late November, I opened my greenhouse door and I almost fell over! The first flower had opened, and to this day it is the most spectacular sight my carnivores have ever greeted me with. The flower was an astounding 2¼ inches across. The petals of this variety were wedge shaped and of a pale pinkish-lavender, with a shiny ebony ovary that was bulbous and nearly half an inch across. The filaments of the stamens were also black and surmounted by brilliant arrow-head shaped anthers of a startling sulfur yellow, a beautiful contrast to the jet-black background. The five styles were pink, about an inch in length, and topped with feathery stigmas.

Drosera pauciflora



Photo by CARL CELLUCCI

As though boasting its beauty, the flower continued to open until the petals were reflexed way back to the scape, so its sexual parts thrust forth in an almost obscene manner. Viewed in profile, this flower is a sight one does not soon forget.

Like many *Drosera* flowers, it opens for one day only. Mine opened at dawn, the petals are totally reflexed by mid-day, and by three o'clock in the afternoon the flower rapidly shrivels and closes. In two or three days the second flower blooms, followed in a few days by the third, and then the fourth. If there is one, each succeeding flower is smaller in size, about two inches across.

Pollination is easy, due to the size of its parts. I have observed hover flies go crazy over the pollen, clinging to the stamen filaments and eating the pollen grains from the anthers with such speed that I have had to shoo them away and pollinate it if not done so immediately by the insects. The flower rapidly closes upon pollination.

My plants flowered from November until March. Only one plant sent up two scapes. It takes a very long time for the seed to mature, the scapes blackening and falling over as the rosettes continue to grow. It appears that the seed actually matures from four to six months after pollination in a small capsule when the plants die back for the summer dormancy. I have heard from one European grower that sometimes the plants will continue to grow without dying back at all. I am assuming that the seed should have a brief resting period, sowing the fine, dust-like seed in Autumn. According to European plant lists I have seen, other color forms exist beside the lavender, such as white and what must be a truly startling scarlet. I would be interested in hearing from other growers who have had experience growing this species, one of the best *droseras* now in cultivation.

I will be sending the seed to the ICPS seed bank. Please inquire of the seed bank for its availability.

If *Drosera regia* has been called the king of sundews for the size of its leaves, I think it appropriate to consider *Drosera pauciflora* its queen for the spectacular show of its flowers.