

Australia's Diminutive Jewels:

The Pygmy Sundews

Notes On Their Care And Keeping

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The pygmy Sundews of Australia are some of the easiest and most interesting C.P. species anyone can grow. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, these *Drosera* are rarely found in C.P. collections. This is too bad, because, aside from being easy to grow, they are attractive and can reproduce like weeds. And yet, in spite of this, they are only rarely available.

These plants are excellent beginner plants. I have found them to be very hardy and adaptable to a wide range of conditions. My plants have tolerated temperatures from 100°F+ down to the mid-20°Fs, with no ill effects. They reproduce easily, either by seed, or with an abundance of gemmae. And, on top of that, a great many species sport absolutely gorgeous flowers.

Pygmy *Drosera* are often divided into two groups: the easy species and the difficult species. I grow species from both groups, and have found no difference in the ease with which these species will grow. Although I can say that the "difficult" species are not quite so liberal in their production of flowers or gemmae. The easy species, on the other hand, tend to produce large numbers of gemmae that are often more than you can handle.

I don't like the easy and difficult designations. My preference is to divide the plants based on their growth habits. I divide them into three categories: rosette, erect, and semi-erect. The first two groups are rather self-explanatory, but the third, semi-erect, requires some explanation. These plants start by sending out erect growing leaves, and as they mature, these leaves fold down around the base of the plant, until the plant has a sheath of leaves around the stem. This presents a rather unique sight, with a mass of silver or white stipules appearing to sit on a base of bright red trap leaves.

I'm fortunate to live in an area of the country which allows me to grow my plants outdoors all year. I water my plants by the tray method. Since it is not unusual for temperatures to reach 80°F or more, even during the winter, I try to keep at least a little water in the trays at all times. While we are on the topic of water, I use distilled or reverse osmosis water. As stated earlier, the pots stand in this pretty much year round, unless weather permits otherwise. The pots should stay moist, but not excessively soggy, and should be allowed to dry some during the cooler months when growth is less vigorous.

Medium

The pygmy *Drosera* are not an especially picky lot when it comes to growth media. The only thing I would not use is live Sphagnum moss, as it will quickly smother these small sundews. I generally use a mix of 50/50 sand and peat. For some species like *D. leucoblata* and *D. androsacae*, pure peat is often suggested. I've found no difference so far between the two types of media, so try your favorite, and use what works best for you.

Housing

Because of their small size, you don't need much to house these little beauties. I generally grow them at density of ten or twelve to a 4 inch pot, although this will depend on the ultimate size of the species being grown. For example, I grow *D. scorpioides* at about 8 per pot (since it is one of the largest species), and I let *D. pygmaea* just do what it wants to do (generally, it carpets the pot with a layer of bright red leaves).

The roots of most pygmies are quite long, so a rather deep pot is preferred. Because of these long roots, I prefer not to transplant them once they are established, but it can be done with care.

Lighting

Because of their small size, these species are excellent subjects to grow indoors under lights. I have had very good results growing them under two 48-inch cool white tubes placed about six

inches above the plants. The major drawback, in my opinion, is that the plants do not usually develop the vivid colors that they would when grown outside in the sun. So, I grow mine outside where they receive full sun most of the day. The only time I move them or shade them is during the hottest part of the summer. As a result, their colors are quite spectacular. One final thing about lights—if you wish your plant to flower or produce gemmae indoors, it is important that your lights are set to mimic the natural cycles of daylight.

Reproduction

There are three methods you may use to reproduce your plants: seed, gemmae, or leaf cuttings. I've never tried leaf cuttings since I have found the other two methods more practical.

In general, pygmy *Drosera* are poor seed producers, although some species like *D. pygmaea* are very prolific and I consider them to be weeds—but pleasant weeds.

Seed should be sown onto the same mix you plan to use for your mature plants and kept damp but not soggy. I place my pots outdoors with my mature plants when the weather permits. Otherwise, germinate the seed indoors under lights.

Most species don't flower until they are at least one year old. Although *D. pygmaea* and probably most of the other small fast growing species will flower in two or three months when grown from gemmae.

The flowers which open in late morning are usually open for one day. They close in late afternoon, at which time they will normally self-pollinate if not pollinated by insects. If at all possible, I recommend that we give nature a hand and brush the open flowers together to effect pollen transfer. This will hopefully produce a greater seed set and allow for greater genetic diversity among the seedlings.

By far the best way to start pygmy Sundews is by growing them from gemmae. These gemmae are actually modified leaves and are produced by the plant in place of the trap leaves as the plant enters dormancy. Gemmae are able to withstand some pretty rough winter conditions. I have found that they are fairly sensitive to dessication and should not be allowed to dry out.

To start the gemmae, I space them evenly on the surface of the chosen medium and place them under artificial lights. As with mature plants, I use two 40-watt tubes. While the gemmae will grow under lower light conditions, the resulting plants are usually small and weak. From conversations with Rob Majarajh (in Canada) and a few other growers, I have reached the conclusion that gemmae grown in low light environment are very prone to fungus attacks. Ideally, when starting the gemmae you should again copy the natural photo-periods. I must confess, being the lazy type I often leave my lights on 24 hours a day and have observed no ill effects. However, one interesting thing I have observed is that when these plants are placed outdoors they start to produce gemmae regardless of the time of year.

Well, there it is. Basically that is all there is to growing these little jewels. Have I convinced you that these plants deserve a place in your collections? If not, here is a final thought. Many of these species have extremely limited ranges making them very vulnerable to the age-old scourge of C.P., HABITAT DESTRUCTION. So, we need to establish as many species as possible in cultivation to avoid their extinction.

Want Ads

Tom F. Kahl (1351 Lake Washington Blvd. So., Seattle, Washington 98144).

T: *N. fusca* for *N. burbidgae*, *tentaculata* or other.

WB: *N.* highlanders and hybrids, any viable *Nepenthes* seed, *U. purpurea*, *S. oreo x leuco*.

Charles Sadler (8447 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 424, Beverly Hills, CA 90211).

WANTED TO BUY: Seeds, cutting, plants, etc. of *Heliamphora* & other *Tepuiana* as well as RARE *Nepenthes*. I am presently successfully cultivating several of these species, though trade material is, at best, limited. Please correspond if you are actively cultivating these species.