

ABOUT OUR COVERS THIS MONTH

While we have had many excellent covers in the past, this month's are rather special.

On the front cover, we see how Geoff Wong has cleverly grown *Genlisea violacea* in a shallow tray with holes in the bottom and setting over a clear container of water so that we can clearly see the twisted trap arms. A few years ago, very few people had genliseas in their collections; now, many of us have five or six species. But we rarely see the traps unless we unearth the plant, often damaging it. Photographing the traps has also been a challenge. But now we see them clearly and Joe Mazrimas has made a fine photo.

On our back cover, we see another happy anomaly. A few of us have tried growing *Aldrovanda vesiculosa* with varying success, usually keeping the plants for no more than a few seasons. When it has been grown, it was almost axiomatic that it never flowered in cultivation. Lubomir Adamec of the Institute of Botany in the Czech Republic not only grown the plant consistently well (outdoors, at that!), but as we can clearly see, it is flowering prolifically. He has even collected seed. Dr. Adamec has promised us an article on his methods and we look forward to it.

DS

THE SAVAGE GARDEN

"Imprinted"

by

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When I was a kid in the mid-sixties I had my first encounter with a venus flytrap. It was an ad in Famous Monsters magazine. It shouted something about the plant eating hamburger and had a fuzzy photo of Charles Darwin in it. I promptly had my mother write a check and mailed in my order. When they finally arrived they came in a styrofoam pot wrapped in plastic. The pot was filled with dry peat moss and three or four "bulbs", with all their leaves cut off. I followed the directions but nothing spectacular occurred. A few semi-developed leaves came up, and soon all the plants turned black.

My family had just recently moved to a seashore community in southern New Jersey, which bordered the Pine Barrens. We transplanted city folk were not always welcomed with opened arms by the local "Pineys", as housing developments went up one after the other along the coastal wetlands. But in school I became friends with a fellow named Russell, whose family lived in Tuckerton for a couple of hundred years. Russell's father raised "coon dogs", and the whole family spoke with a near-southern accent peculiar to the Pineys. It was Russell who told me, "I know where venus fly-catchers grow." I found this hard to believe.

He took me to Tuckerton Lake, right in the middle of town, on Route 9. This was a small lake of a few acres, the color of weak tea that the locals called “cedar water.” One side ran along Route 9, adjacent to the two blocks of downtown Tuckerton. Ironically right across the highway was a salt-water lagoon lined with clamming docks. Tuckerton, which sits on the Great Bay north of Atlantic City, was once called “Clamtown.” The southwest part of the lake was a public park and beach, where locals held barbecues and swam in the cold tea-colored waters. A few privately owned homes sat on the lake closest to the park and town, but most of this shallow, placid pool of water was wild and undeveloped, bordered by a mass of cedar trees and scrub, growing right into the edge of the lake.

It was Memorial Day weekend, and I could hear the picnickers at the park as Russell led me down the well-manicured lawn of a privately owned home that overlooked the lake. I was nervous about cutting through the yard but Russell assured me that the owner had bought one of his Paw’s coon dogs and wouldn’t mind. I could hear a dog barking from the house. Anyway, Russ said, this was the only way to get through the thicket that surrounded the lake. The lawn changed to a wall of pines, and we followed a well-used path down a gradual slope to the lake. The pines changed to southern white cedar. We had to stop. The trunks of the trees sat in water, and each trunk was surrounded by little islands of what Russell called sphagnum moss.

“There they are,” Russell said, pointing.

I looked in awe at the strangest plants I had ever seen. Half-buried in the moss were rosetted clumps of deeply purple hollow leaves, with spiny collars and strange reddish flowers rising from the center. “These aren’t venus flytraps,” I said, but I was hardly disappointed. “My Paw says they eat bugs,” Russell assured me, and sure enough when I peered into one of the hollow, leathery-looking leaves, I saw bugs swimming around in the wells of water each leaf held.

“Hey, what’s this?” my friend said. He plucked something from the moss and held it up in his fingers. It was an image that would forever be imprinted upon my brain. A ray of sunlight broke through the cedars, shining directly on what Russell held in his hand. It was a small, circular, green leaf covered with hundreds of red tentacles like a pin-cushion, each ending in a tiny drop of dew. Every drop caught the light of the sun, and they sparkled and glittered like jewels.

“My Paw says these are flycatchers, too,” Russell said. “They’re all over the place.”

I looked down at my feet. Sure enough, the spongy green and red moss appeared scattered with diamonds. These small plants were covered with dead and struggling insects, too. I looked around in awe, for it was a beautiful sight: tea-colored water, greyish trunks of cedars, billowy mounds of reddish-green sphagnum islands on which grew the strange plants that looked like they came from outer-space! I would never forget it, and had no idea how that moment would forever influence my life.

Russell and I dug up some of the weird plants and took them to school the following week. Even our teachers were mystified. But soon I was led to the library and to several books that answered my curiosity. What we had found growing on Tuckerton Lake were purple pitcher plants and sundews, carnivorous plants that, just like the venus flytrap, ate insects too!

My interest became a hobby. I read the few books and articles on the subject available at the time: from Paul Zahl’s colorful pieces in National Geographic to Darwin’s *Insectivorous Plants*. I was photographed at age 12 with my terrarium of CP in the local paper. I made my father drive me deep into the New Jersey Pine Barrens, where he would drop me off for hours at a time so I could slosh around in the bogs near

Batso. In my classes I daydreamed and doodled pictures of hooded pitcher plants and round-leaved sundews, and most of my school reports were somehow tied to CP. My mom called me a “fanatic”, because I would sit for hours in front of my terrarium, staring hypnoid at these beautiful and strange plants. When my family drove south to Florida, I forced my Dad to drive us to Wilmington, North Carolina, so I could see trumpet plants and flytraps growing in the wild. In college at the University of Miami, I would hunt out butterworts in the hammocks of the Everglades. In California, cobra plants, just like Paul Zahl did thirty years before. Time has gone by, and I am still a fanatic. I still grow purple pitcher plants that I removed from Tuckerton Lake when I was a teenager. I left New Jersey and have lived in California for over twenty years.

A few years ago I returned to Tuckerton. My brother’s family still lives there, just up the street and around the corner from Tuckerton Take.

I asked my eleven year old nephew Anthony if he wanted to visit the place where I had first discovered pitcher plants and sundews when I was around his age. He was very excited. and we took a walk to the lake.

The abandoned beach and picnic area was crowded with weeds. A sign at the brown water’s edge read “Warning: Unsafe for Swimming”. Anthony told me the lake was now polluted.

We snuck through the yard Russell had taken me to over two and half decades before. No one stopped us. We went down the path that lead through the thicket. We came to the water’s edge. I stood there in shock, like a speechless idiot. I was physically trembling.

It was a Sunday, and the mud-covered bulldozer stood silent. What was once the picturesque lakeside border of bogs and cedars was now a ravaged slope of cleared mud, from the top of the hill to the water’s edge. Just beyond the bulldozer was a mountain of debris the size of an eighteen-wheeler. Cut tree logs, crushed heaps of bushes, branches and brown, dying leaves. A huge monstrous trash pile. Scattered all over the ground, dried and crisp, were the carcasses of pitcher plants, atop a bed of crusty sphagnum criss-crossed by the deep ruts of heavy machinery. The foundation of a house was already in the ground. At the top of the hill a sign by the new road: Lake View Homesites. The developers were either kind enough or lazy enough to have left a cedar here, another there. At their bases in the muddy water we saw one or two pitcher plants, isolated survivors of what looked like a localized unnatural catastrophe. Couldn’t they put in a house, I thought, without having to destroy everything around it?

My nephew picked up a shriveled leaf of *Sarracenia purpurea*. “is this a pitcher plant?” he asked. I told him it was. We couldn’t find any sundews.

It took me a few years, but finally this spring I made a little mini-bog to memorialize that section of Tuckerton Lake. There are probably still a lot of pitcher plants and sundews on the far side of the lake, but who knows how far the housing development will eventually go, or the effects of water pollution.

I took a twelve inch plastic garden bowl and filled it with peat and sand. I planted a clone of my Tuckerton Lake purple pitcher plant, along with clumps of *Drosera rotundifolia*, *intermedia*, *filiformis* and the natural cross of the latter two species, *D. x hybrida*. I added a few pinches of live sphagnum, and scattered some dried pine needles and cedar leaves, but they were not from southern white cedars. I entitled this bog garden “New Jersey Pine Barrens” and set it out in our educational display at the nursery. But privately, I think of it as a little piece of Tuckerton Lake, a small but memorable part of my childhood, something my nephew Anthony might never see.