

GROWING *DROSERA CHRYSOLEPIS*

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Keywords: cultivation: *Drosera chrysolepis*.

The South American sundew *Drosera chrysolepis* is an attractive and unique plant. It forms a long upright stem with spear-shaped leaves, and can grow quite large. Comparing this species to one which is more commonly grown, Fernando Rivadavia describes it as, "looks like a giant *D. scorpioides*." This sundew has proven to be rather difficult to grow, and so is recommended for the experienced cultivator or sundew connoisseur. For this reason *D. chrysolepis* may continue to be extremely rare in cultivation.

The particular specimen illustrated (Figure 1) was grown from seed which was originally collected from nature in Serra do Cipo, Brazil, by our fellow carnivorous plant fanatic, the famous Fernando Rivadavia. A plant of the size in the photograph, about 13 cm (5 inches) will take well over a year to grow, thus making the plant all the more precious to its growers.

Seed is the most reliable way to propagate *D. chrysolepis* in quantity, since it does not sprout from leaf or root cuttings. Seed may be scattered atop a peat and sand mixture suitable for cultivating sundews. Germination will take place after several weeks, so it is best to supply very little light until sprouting occurs to prevent an overgrowth of algae and mosses. Newly germinated seedlings are fairly large compared to seedlings of most other sundews. Growth beyond the seedling stage will be very slow, so keep in mind that producing a fine-looking mature plant will require a considerable amount of patience. The newborn seedlings will feed upon minute springtails which are naturally occurring in the pots. This gives the capturing plantlets an extra boost. When the seedlings reach a centimeter or more in diameter they are then transplanted into a potting mixture of chopped live *Sphagnum* and perlite, in which they seem to grow best. The reason seed is not sown directly on live *Sphagnum* is that the *Sphagnum* will grow more quickly and smother the seedlings. Since growth is slow for this species, recovery from transplanting requires a period of convalescence. Following transplanting or any root disturbance, a clear plastic cup or other suitable tenting is placed over the plant to insure high humidity and prevent drying out. When active growth recommences, the tenting may be removed. Cultured fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*) are an excellent food source for larger plants, and of course there is an added bonus in the thrill of watching the plants consume these little pests.



Figure 1: A 13 cm tall *Drosera chrysolepis* in cultivation (photograph by A. T. H.)

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D. chrysolepis does not have a definite dormancy period, though growth seems to come and go in irregular cycles when grown under artificial lights with an unchanging long day photoperiod. You will find that the

plant is a very shy flowerer when grown under artificial conditions. So if you are thinking of trying to get your plant to produce seed, you must experiment. We wish you luck, since we have yet to see it flower.

There is still another method of reproduction, albeit slow, which you can use to reproduce your plant. As your *D. chrysolepis* grows to an extreme height, you may wish to reduce it again, as there is a maximum optimal height. This may be done by simply cutting the stem and replanting the top. New roots are produced near to the meristem or growth point, so cut the stem about five cm below, strip off most of the lower leaves and plant vertically so that the growth tip is just above ground. Now tent it as described earlier. Plant the lower portion of the stem, retaining a few leaves, as this may sprout a new growth point and form another plant. *D. chrysolepis* replanted in this manner makes the plant's growth immortal.

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