

## PARTY TIME—MIX AND MATCH

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Keywords: cultivation: bog gardens, California, *Disa*.

Some of you have, but some have not, heard about mixing *Disa*—the South African orchid—with insectivorous plants. Below is a short summary of my experiences with growing *Disa* and carnivorous plants together.

I started raising carnivorous plants when I was 15 years old. My mom bought me my first cobra lily and Venus flytrap from a supermarket in Michigan. I composed my first member's note in Carnivorous Plant Newsletter in 1991 (Carniv. Pl. Newslett., 1991, 20:3, p67). It talked about how more people should be involved with their local carnivorous plant society. I believe I was a little over zealous for being only 18, and wanting to go on exotic field trips to visit tropical carnivorous plants in their native habitat.

I learned much over the next 11 years, as I raised and have raised carnivorous plants during my high school, college and post-college years. (There were a few years that my collection did not look so hot because of school and work.) Whenever I had a party in college, guests always made my *Nepenthes* in a fish tank the talk of the party!

Currently, I have only about 75-80 carnivorous plants and all are planted in handcrafted pots designed by a Bay Area artist (Marni Turkel). My collection consists of *Sarracenia*, *Drosera*, *Pinguicula*, *Dionaea*, *Darlingtonia*, *Heliophora*, *Cephalotus*, *Utricularia*, *Brocchinia*, *Genlisea* and *Nepenthes*. At one point I had over 200 carnivorous plants (and that is quite a few since I also had over 200 orchids and other exotic plants to deal with). Since then I have cut back my collection, and now I have only half a dozen pots of orchids. Many of my *Disa* can be found at California Carnivores (in Sebastopol, California) and at a few private Bay Area carnivorous plant collections.

It was not until after my college years that I started experimenting with adding *Disa* orchids to my carnivorous plant bog gardens. Actually it began by accident, as I was trying to save a struggling *Disa* from perishing altogether. The procedure was fast; I just took the *Disa* from its pot and placed it in the bog garden in peat moss amongst the Venus flytraps, sundews and pitcher plants. The plant grew extremely well and, having a leaf span of about almost 38 cm (15 inches) long, it started to take over the bog garden itself.

*Disa* plants are somewhat easy to grow but like all plants they definitely have their strict rules to good growth. These South African natives are found on mountain slopes in full sun, near waterfalls or streams, in constantly wet soils, and are often bathed in a cool, humid mist. In short, they thrive in the same conditions as most carnivorous plants: bright light, constantly moist, acidic soil, and constantly moist in pure water. In cultivation, fertilizers are not necessary but can be used at a very diluted strength such as a 30-10-10 or a 20-20-20 at 0.2 ml fertilizer per liter water (1/8th teaspoon per gallon). I do not use any fertilizers on my plants and still get flower spikes that are over 60 cm (2 feet) tall. Air circulation and cleanliness around the growing area is also of utmost importance in order to reduce the risk of infection of various fungi such as *Cylindrocarpum* that can lead to the rotting of the plants. Cleary 3336, a wettable powder can be used to help prevent some of these fungi from turning into a disaster.

*Disa* in my bog gardens are planted in sphagnum peat moss, mixed with a little perlite and sand. I may add a top-dressing of live sphagnum moss. They are planted right beside *Sarracenia purpurea*, *Drosera*, and Venus flytraps.

All of my bog gardens are planted in drained, plastic planter bowls or plastic planter boxes. They rest on shelves under a balcony and receive direct sun for only a few hours a day early in the morning. To keep them cool, even in the hottest areas of my yard, I give them as much as



Figure 1: *Disa* Foam 'San Francisco' FCC/AOS. Photo by Jeremy Beckman.



Figure 2: *Disa* Veitchii hybrid. Photo by Jeremy Beckman.



Figure 3: *Disa* Foam 'San Francisco' FCC/AOS growing in mini-bog gardens. Photo by the author.

50% shade. I grow my *Disa* plants in undrained pots so the peaty mix can dry out a little—not keeping them constantly soaked helps lessen the chance of rotting. Soon I will be dividing and placing some of the plants that I want to keep in ceramic bowls that have drainage holes and give the rest away.

Nowadays I raise my *Disa* plants in a lighter mix to improve aeration among the roots, but the results are the same as in the peaty mix. The key to growing a healthy *Disa* is the acidic pH (5-6) of the soil, and using absolutely the purest water (below 100ppm) one can find. A little bit of sun, and keeping the growing areas moderately clean, will help keep diseases to a minimum. Temperature ranges for growing *Disa* are between 4-27°C (40-80°F), but they can withstand extremes outside of this for short periods. The main flowering season is from May to August. *Disa* never really go dormant. The plants reproduce vegetatively much like common bromeliads—the main flowering stem from the mother plant dies and is replaced by new offshoots. Repotting should be done in late fall or early spring, using fresh media, trim away dead leaves at this time.

Since I sold and traded most of my *Disa* plants this year for rarer carnivorous plants I have only a limited supply of the highly awarded *Disa* Foam 'San Francisco' and *Disa uniflora* 'Big Pink' available for trade. I know several people in the greater Bay Area in California from whom I have purchased plants, and you can purchase plants from them as well. Email me for contacts.

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## NAMES OF CULTIVARS REGISTERED IN 2003

- Pinguicula* 'Libelulita', B.Rice & E.Salvia, Carniv. Pl. Newslett. 31: 83 (2002), 1 Apr.  
*Sarracenia* 'Chas' Brew', C.Brewer & S.Ploszak, Carniv. Pl. Newslett. 32: 34 (2003), 13 May.  
*Sarracenia* 'Cobra Nest', J.L.Booman, Carniv. Pl. Newslett. 32: 34 (2003), 13 May.  
*Sarracenia* 'Scarlet Belle', B.Hanrahan, Carniv. Pl. Newslett. 32: 34 (2003), 13 May.