

ON GROWING MEXICAN *PINGUICULA*

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Keywords: cultivation: Mexican *Pinguicula*.

I would like to write about growing Mexican *Pinguicula* for those enthusiasts that do not grow them. You may not know what you are missing. Most that do grow them would agree that they are a very beautiful plant to have. I have grown temperate species, but do not think there is any comparison; the Mexican *Pinguicula* get so much larger, they live much longer, are a little easier to grow, propagate very easily from leaf cuttings, and bloom so beautifully for such a long time. Most of mine bloom continuously for three to four weeks, with three or four blooms at a time. Most of the flowers are shades of white, pink, and blue, but since I have a form of color blindness so all the pinks and blues look the same to me. *Pinguicula laeana* is the only butterwort that has all-red flowers. Some species (such as *P. immaculata*) have all-white flowers, as do some clones of commonly grown species such as *P. moranensis*. Imagine about twenty of these various *Pinguicula* all in bloom with three or four flowers per plant—reds, whites and blues all mixed together—it is a very pretty sight.

As for size, Mexican *Pinguicula* are surpassed only by a few of the largest European species (such as *P. longifolia* and *P. vallisneriifolia*). The leaves of some of *P. moranensis* plants frequently reach about 15 cm (6 inches), long, and one of mine produces leaves over 18 cm (7 inches) long. Butterworts are not hard to obtain, although some are a little more time consuming to find—have patience!

Mexican *Pinguicula* are very easy to propagate with leaf cuttings. Simply pull gently at a leaf base until it twists off, then set it on slightly dampened pure vermiculite (this prevents leaf rot) in a covered container in good light. Presto! In a week or two you will notice little bulges where new plants are forming (usually at the leaf base). When these form roots, plant them in 50/50 sand/peat (with a little vermiculite added). Now you have more Mexican *Pinguicula* growing!

I grow my Mexican *Pinguicula* under two 1.2 m (4 foot) fluorescent lights. I keep my plants sitting in trays filled with about 2-3 cm (1 inch) of rainwater. They catch plenty of fungus gnats during the summer, but I also apply a foliar spray of acid fertilizer a couple times a month. In fall you must recognize their dormancy period and grow them much drier, otherwise they will rot! During the winter dormancy they are much more like a succulent plant, and it easier to have rot problems keeping them too damp than too dry. It is best to grow them with no water in the tray, but I do mist them heavily every few days until the resume spring growth.

I would like to encourage folks to give them a try. If you are not growing them already, you might just like it. And for those that are growing them, especially the rarer ones, make sure you propagate them so they can be enjoyed by others. Propagating them and spreading them around only helps to insure their survival in cultivation well into the future.

As I write this it is fall and winter is quickly approaching. All my temperate carnivorous plants are slowly going dormant—calling it quits for another year—including my Mexican *Pinguicula*. But this means I have time to plan for spring: new carnivorous plant acquisitions, collecting seed, plans for repotting and dividing plants. It is time for all of us to look back and learn from our plant successes and losses, and for many, for finding even more space for the ever increasing size of our carnivorous plant collections. But also, my attention turns to my winter growing *Drosera* and the few *Nepenthes* I keep. Good growing to you all, and remember to propagate, trade, sell and buy; keep this good hobby flourishing for us all.

—Ed: It is interesting to read Gary's technique since it shows that what works for some does not work for others. Conventional wisdom on Mexican *Pinguicula* is that one should never use acid fertilizers on them! (BR)



Figure 1: *Pinguicula* 'John Rizzi' at Peter D'Amato's nursery. Photograph by B. Rice.



Figure 2: *Pinguicula emarginata* flower. Photograph by B. Rice.