Sand wick for *Cephalotus*

David Colbourn • Penrith • New South Wales • Australia • littlepotofhorrors@gmail.com

Cephalotus follicularis or the Albany Pitcher Plant, grows along the southern coastal districts of Western Australia from Augusta to Cheynes Beach, 65 km east of Albany (Lowrie 2013). Plants typically grow in peat-based soils in swamps, or in one case a coastal cliff face, where there is a constant flow of fresh water.

In the swamps, *Cephalotus* grows slightly above the water table and often at the base of *Melaleuca* species where the soil is elevated above the surrounding swamp through an accumulation of vegetative material (Fig. 1). When searching for *Cephalotus*, plants will usually be found on the up-stream side of the swamps where fresh water permeates from higher seeps and springs. These observations are important when cultivating *Cephalotus*, particularly when selecting which method is used to water potted plants.

The water tray method is a common method of supplying water to carnivorous plants as it allows many species to be grown together and allows a provision of stored water to plants whilst growers are away from their plants for a couple of days. The water tray method does have disadvantages in that the water temperature can increase significantly during hot weather and the water condition can become stagnant and high in dissolved salts if not flushed regularly; common factors in the death of many cultivated Albany Pitcher Plants.

Many growers combat the Albany Pitcher Plant's inherent Achilles' heel by regular overhead watering, self-watering pots, using a wick-based system, or potting plants into very aerated potting mixes. Whilst these methods are fine, I have developed a technique to allow *Cephalotus* to be grown with other swamp growing carnivorous plants using the water tray method for watering.

Figure 1: *Cephalotus follicularis* growing along the southern coast of Western Australia.

Figure 2: Illustration of the potting method used for growing *Cephalotus follicularis*.

The principle is simple and is based upon observations of how water moves through sand at a beach. A layer of peat or *Sphagnum* moss is placed in the bottom of the pot. This serves to block the drainage holes and prevent the sand from washing out of the pot. Coarse washed river sand is then added to the pot to about two thirds to three quarters of the height of the pot. Finally, a layer of peat moss is added on top of the sand to the rim of the pot. *Cephalotus* is then planted into this peat layer, with the addition of a small amount of pebbles added as a top dressing. This potting method is illustrated in Figure 2.

The pot may then be placed into the water tray. It does not matter too much if the water level gets halfway up the pot, however, the usual 2-5 cm of water is ideal.

The theory behind this method is two-fold. First, the top layer of peat is kept aerated and is never allowed to come into direct contact with the water and therefore will remain fresh. Secondly, the sand layer wicks up the required amount of water which is then transported to the peat and root zone.

This method allows me to grow *Cephalotus* with most of my *Drosera*, *Sarracenia*, etc., saving me space and the requirement to set up an alternate watering system for my plants. I developed this system two years ago and have now transferred all of my *Cephalotus* to it.

References

Lowrie, A. 2013. Carnivorous Plants of Australia, Magnum Opus, Volume 1. Poole, Dorset, England: Redfern Natural History Productions.