

Stop 163 Kid's Tour – Insectivorous Plants, Warm Temperate

(sfx: eerie music, echo on voice) "It came from outer space... giant man-eating plants that were on a mission to take over the world..." (sfx: music ends with a needle scratching across the surface of the record.)

Despite what you might have seen in a science-fiction movie, *no* carnivorous plant is large enough to trap a human being! Just take a look at the size of the plants in these pots and you'll see they could barely hurt a fly – which happens to be one of the favorites meals of this plant, the Venus Fly Trap. Also called 'insectivorous' plants, these predators of the plant world attract, capture, kill and digest mostly *insects*!

Nature has developed different ways for these plants to use their leaves to turn them into insect eating machines. Take a look around and you'll see a variety of insectivorous plants on display. 'Passive' leaf traps like the sundew can have sweet gluey surfaces that attract their victims. Or they can be like the pitcher plants. They're designed to lure insects down into their container-shaped leaves for some nectar. Unfortunately, tiny hairs that point downward on the inside walls of the pitcher prevent the prey from escaping and eventually, the plant consumes it.

'Active' leaf traps require the plant to move quickly if a visiting bug disturbs its' sensitive leaf hairs. In the case of the Venus Fly Trap, a critter must touch at least two hairs before the leaf will snap shut. If it was a false alarm, the trap will re-open in about an hour. Otherwise, over the next three to five days, the plant will digest the imprisoned victim, absorbing nutrients that will help it grow. Considering the Venus Fly Trap has such a world-wide reputation, you might be interested to know that the only place in the wild that this plant lives, is a 10 mile wide and 100 mile long strip of land along the coast of North and South Carolina!