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## **Chomp 2! Return of the Carnivorous Plants**

**San Francisco's Conservatory of Flowers 'regurgitates' its popular carnivorous plant exhibition to once again become a garden of deadly delights**

SAN FRANCISCO – Oh no! They're back, and they're more frightfully fun than ever! This summer, San Francisco's Conservatory of Flowers becomes a Little Shop of Horticultural Horrors with a sequel to its 2007 exhibition "Chomp!" **On view May 7 – October 31, 2010, "Chomp 2! Return of the Carnivorous Plants" features expanded displays of these natural born killers with dazzling, new additions like the *Dionaea B-52*, the world's largest Venus flytrap with traps up to two inches square, and the aptly named (for a bug, that is) 'Abandoned Hope,' a pitcher plant hybrid that can grow up to two feet tall.**

Visitors can feast their eyes on hundreds of multi-colored, meat-eating plants arranged in swampy, living bogs that showcase species both by their trapping strategies and by their native regions and countries.

### **New Regional Bogs**

Surprisingly, the United States is home to the largest number of carnivorous plant genera, so four new mini bogs highlight the beauty and diversity of homegrown killers. Visitors will be amazed to discover the unexpected treasure trove of purple pitcher plants that hail from chilly New England. Their carnivorous cousin, the white trumpet plant, is featured in the Gulf Coast bog. Some botanists speculate that these luminous plants may be adapted to lure in a bumper crop of bugs on full moon nights, particularly the Harvest moon. A North Carolina bog highlights the fact that this state is the one place on earth where Venus flytraps are native. And locals may be surprised to discover that California is home to the sinuously curved cobra plant (*Darlingtonia californica*) whose bulbous green head and twisted red "tongue" make it a dead ringer for its namesake.

Other regional displays feature plants from South Africa where the widest variety of sundews can be found including *Drosera regia* whose leaves can grow up to 2 feet long; Eastern Australia, known for its forked sundews that resemble living spider webs; and Mexico, home to the largest number of butterworts on the planet.

### **Displays by Trapping Strategy**

Most carnivorous plants grow where the soil is poor, lacking in nutrients or too acidic so, over thousands of years, they have evolved to make the best of a challenging situation, trapping living things to get needed nutrients. Visitors can investigate how these plants attract and kill their prey in another area of the exhibit. Here, plants are organized by trapping strategies such as the familiar snap traps of the Venus flytrap. But visitors will likely be surprised by the trapping strategies of lesser-known carnivores such as the suction trap of the water-loving bladderwort.

Bladderworts are the largest group of carnivores in the kingdom with over 200 species -- many of which are very small and innocent in appearance. These tiny killers, however, are the fastest acting of the carnivorous plants, sucking prey out of the water at a speed of up to 1/10,000th of a second. Although visitors will never be able to catch this plant in high-speed action, they will be delighted to learn how its trap is activated. A special trapdoor opens when mosquito larvae or some other small critter brushes against tiny trigger hairs. The plant slurps up victim, water and all. Once closed, it secretes a digestive enzyme to slowly consume its prey. When dinner is done, it ejects the husk while glands inside the bladder absorb the water the plant took in, thereby creating a vacuum and resetting the trap.

Sticky flypaper traps are the specialty of species like the sundews and butterworts. The leaves of the sundew sport hundreds of pin-shaped red tentacles (actually stalked glands) which are covered with a mucous secretion. When an insect lands, thinking this glistening surface might hold nectar, it gets stuck. As it struggles to free itself, the motion triggers other tentacles that bend towards it. Within a few minutes there is no escape as the entire leaf wraps over the victim and digestive enzymes are excreted to dissolve it. Butterworts employ a similar flypaper-like strategy and are distinguished for having some of the strongest natural glue known.

The Asian pitcher plant is an alluring example of a pitfall trap. With a brightly colored rim around the mouth and a teasingly half-open lid, these pendulous pitchers full of watery nectar invite the curiosity of animals and insects. Walking on the rim is no problem, but woe is the critter that is tempted to take a sip of nectar. One false move and the unsuspecting victim is sent skiing down the slippery, waxy walls to a liquidy death because this is no ordinary drink of water. The liquid at the bottom of the pitcher is a digestive enzyme and once in, creatures are not likely to get out. The interior wall sports a mean set of downward pointing hairs to ensure that even the most avid climber cannot escape. Something small like a midge is digested in a few hours. A fly might take up to two days. Some of the largest species have been known to consume rats, lizards and even small monkeys.

### **Other Exhibit Highlights**

Families will enjoy some of the many kid friendly amenities in the exhibition such as magnifying lenses that allows young ones to get a bug's eye view of these peckish plants. On Saturdays and Sundays at 12 and 2 PM each day, The Flytrap Theater features daily volunteer-led demonstrations and plant dissections. Available at all times for just \$3 is a special Chomp! field guide, a great hunt and find activity that sends kids on a mission to search the globe for killer plants.

A new highlight this year is a stunning display of 25 botanical drawings by Mary Harden's Master Artists of the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society's Illustration Program. The superb collection of watercolor drawings beautifully reveals some of the structural details that make these plants so alluring.

The Conservatory's gift shop will also be selling live carnivorous plants for the duration of the exhibition.

So, don't miss "Chomp 2! Return of the Carnivorous Plants" -- this summer's most fatal attraction!

Media sponsors include: ABC7/KGO-TV, KQED Public Broadcasting and SF Station.

Exhibit partners include: California Carnivores, Raccoon Ridge, Bay Area Carnivorous Plant Society, Paxton Gate, Goodscapes, Master Artists of the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society's Illustration Program.

### **Related Programs**

#### **The Savage Garden: An Introduction to Carnivorous Plants**

Wednesday, July 14 at 1 PM

\$15 general; \$7 youth 11 and under (includes Conservatory admission)

Tickets can be purchased online at: <http://www.conservatoryofflowers.org/events/specialevents>

Learn about the joys of the savage garden with Peter D'Amato, owner of California Carnivores, a nursery in Sebastopol, CA that houses the world's largest collection of carnivorous plants. D'Amato will share living specimens of the plant kingdom's most wanted and discuss tips for growing and cultivating plants.

### **Background**

The Conservatory of Flowers is a spectacular living museum of rare and beautiful tropical plants under glass. From Borneo to Bolivia, the 1,750 species of plants at the Conservatory represent unusual flora from more than 50 countries around the world. Immersive displays in five galleries include the lowland tropics, highland tropics, aquatic plants, potted plants and special exhibits. Opened in 1879, the wood and glass greenhouse is the oldest existing conservatory in North America and has attracted millions of visitors to Golden Gate Park since it first opened its doors. It is designated as a city, state and national historic landmark and was one of the 100 most endangered sites of the World Monuments Fund.

### **General Information**

**The Conservatory of Flowers is located in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park at 100 John F. Kennedy Dr. and is open Tuesdays – Sundays from 10 am to 4:30 pm. The exhibition is free with regular paid admission to the Conservatory.** Admission for San Francisco residents is \$5 general; \$3 youth 12-17, seniors and students with ID; \$1.50 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. Admission for non-residents is \$7 general, \$5 youth 12-17, seniors and students

with ID; \$2 children 5-11; children 4 and under FREE. **The public should call 415-831-2090f**  
**or visit [www.conservatoryofflowers.org](http://www.conservatoryofflowers.org) for more information.**

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