



Venus Flytrap

The plant-predator waits patiently while its' next meal wanders about, unaware that danger lurks just centimeters away. Settling down to taste some sweet-smelling sap, the unsuspecting fly has made a fatal mistake.

The blink-of-an-eye closing of a Venus Flytrap's leaf on an unsuspecting fly is one of the fastest movements in the plant kingdom. Lots of plants move, but their movements are usually very slow. It can take days for flower buds to open and hours for leaves to respond to sunlight. Flytraps snap shut much faster - in about half a second!!

Plants that eat other creatures?

It sounds like a strange experiment, but there's actually nothing unnatural about it; carnivorous plants have existed on this planet for thousands of years. There are more than 500 different kinds of these plants, with appetites ranging from insects and spiders to small, one- or two-cell aquatic organisms.

To be considered carnivorous, the plants have to be able to:

- attract insects
- capture bugs
- discriminate between food and non-food
- digest their prey

What Flytraps Eat

- spiders
- flies
- caterpillars
- crickets
- slugs



How do they do it?

1. The leaves of the trap release sweet sap nectar that draws in insects searching for food.
2. When an insect lands or crawls on the trap, it will run into one of six, short, stiff hairs on the trap's leaf surface. These are called trigger hairs, and when they are brushed together, the leaves close down on the offending insect within half a second.
3. Even without a brain to analyse what it's eating, the Venus Flytrap can tell the difference between insects and non-edible things that might fall into its trap. An insect caught inside the trap will move about trying to escape, signalling to the plant to close its leaf trap. Objects like stones, twigs and leaves that fall into the trap (or things that are put

there like a pencil poked in), will not move around in the same way. It takes about 12 hours for the trap to 'know' the item is not food and the leaves spread apart again. The unwanted object either falls out as the leaves re-open or is blown out by the wind.

Once the trap fully closes, the leaves squeeze together to form an airtight seal so that bacteria can't get in and the digestive fluids and insect parts are kept inside the trap, so it can start 'eating'.

4. If an insect is too large, the trap will not be able to form a tight enough seal and bacteria and mould will get in. If this happens, the trap will turn black as the leaves rot, and the whole thing will eventually just drop off the plant. After about 10 to 12 closures, the traps lose the ability to capture anything and the plant will live for about 2 to 3 months. Like all plants, the Venus Flytrap also needs water, light, nutrients in the soil and air to grow.

Growing Flytraps at Home

Your Venus Flytrap at home needs an environment that is humid - with lots of sunlight, warmth and moisture. You will have to check the soil in the pot to make sure that it never dries out. But you shouldn't overdo it either, Venus Flytraps need moist soil to keep their roots wet, but they don't want to be submerged in water!

Feeding your plant

If your plant is growing inside your house, where there is not a huge supply of spiders, flies and other Flytrap delicacies, you will have to provide them yourself. They don't need much - two or three small insects (such as a housefly) per month will do the trick. You also may have to gently clean out the leftovers following a meal - by gently blowing on the leaves or washing the traps with water.

