

# The New England Carnivorous Plant Society

## PLANTING AND CARE OF PYGMY DROSERA GEMMAE

Pygmy sundews are the little jewels of the carnivorous plant world. Native to Australia, these plants have a growth cycle different from the sundews of North America, and a completely different way of reproducing. With a little attention to the differences, these plants are also easy to grow and are worthy additions to any CP collection.

Pygmy Sundews typically grow in areas of Australia that have hot dry summers, and cool wet winters. They prefer sandy areas, sometimes with some peat mixed in, but often grow in plain “white” sand, in full sun. It is during the hottest weather of summer that the plants go dormant, forming tight little buds encased by the stipules, little growths that are at the base of the leaf petiole. Once the weather cools, and the nights start getting damp from fog, the plants begin to open, and the first leaves reappear for the fall and winter season. Once these leaves have grown a bit, and the fall and winter days get cooler and shorter, pygmy sundews begin the production of gemmae, or brood bodies, in the center or crown area of the plant. These are held by a tightly coiled hair, part of the stipule, and when the winter rains start, a drop of water hitting the center of the crown will cause the gemmae to all shoot outward, spreading the gemmae. These gemmae are able to root, and quickly become new plants, slowly spreading the sundews.

Growers and collectors take advantage of these gemmae, using them to grow collections, and they are often used for trading. Pygmy sundews are popular because they are different, beautiful {especially under a magnifying glass} and the flowers of some species are as big as, or bigger, than the plants themselves. Some have scented flowers also.

### Removing the Gemmae

The first step when propagating with gemmae is the removal of the gemmae from the plant. This is easily accomplished with a little care and practice. Remove the potted plant from the others, and let it drain for a few minutes. You do not want water dripping when you turn the plant over. While the plant is draining, put a clean piece of white paper on the work area. Once the plant has drained, turn the plant on its side, and while holding it above the white paper, gently tease the gemmae out of the center of the plant with a toothpick. It takes a little care, as some of the gemmae may fly some distances. Also, you want to try to not get any gemmae stuck to the tentacles of the sundew leaf. If you do get some stuck, they can also be removed with the toothpick. Once you have gotten the gemmae from the center of the plant, you can put the plant back into its growing area.

### Planting media

As stated, pygmy sundews usually grow in sandy depressions, where they are often flooded. Sometimes, the sand is covered with a small film of organic material, making it

look dark or even black. In cultivation, and when propagating with gemmae, it is usually better to go with a sandy peat mix. Typically, this is a 2:1 or even 3:1 sand/peat mixture. This allows better germination of the gemmae, with less loss. Fully-grown plants also do well in cultivation with the added peat. The media is placed in pots filled to the rim, often with a mound in the middle of the pot. Standard sized plastic pots work well.

#### Planting the Gemmae

The biggest trouble with planting might seem to be moving the small gemmae from the paper to the pot, and getting them in the proper place. However this is easily accomplished with the toothpick. Simply touch the tip of the toothpick to one of the gemmae, and it will usually adhere to the toothpick. Carry it to the proper planting place, and touch it to the soil. It may occasionally be necessary to let the soil “pull” it off. If you have trouble getting the gemmae to adhere to the toothpick, dip the end of the toothpick in a drop of water to help with the adhesion. Remember, adult pygmy sundews are small, most no bigger than a dime or nickel, so they can be spread out or planted rather close. Once you have a pot planted, it is best to water once from the top, with a gentle spray of water. This helps seat the gemmae, making better soil contact, and keeps the gemmae moist. The pot can then be placed on a tray, with water  $\frac{3}{4}$  the way up the side of the pot. Keep the pot covered to maintain humidity till the gemmae germinates, and supply bright light, but not direct sunlight.

#### Care of pygmy sundews

Once the gemmae have germinated, and they sundews are growing, you can move the plants to more direct light, even allowing sunlight. Some plants respond to good light by turning a beautiful red color, much like a Cape Sundew {*Drosera capensis*}. In nature, the plants grow during the cool part of the fall and winter, and go dormant in the warmer spring and summer, as the wet areas dry out. In cultivation however, most types can survive a wetter summer, and will continue to grow. If you want them to go dormant, slowly allow the plants to go dry, as the weather warms. Once they form their dormant buds, keep them in a warm place out of direct sunlight! Occasionally water them, imitating a summer thunderstorm, so the pot does not dry out completely. In nature, the roots of pygmy sundews often grow very long, allowing the plant to take advantage of every available bit of soil moisture. Also, some of the dormant buds may help by collecting the small amount of dew that forms even in a hot summer. Therefore, it may be beneficial to allow a small amount of water to remain in the tray yearround, or to not let the pot go completely dry. Properly cared for, your plant will grow, flower, and produce more gemmae, for you to trade for more plants!

#### FURTHER READING

**The Savage Garden** By Peter D’Amato

**Carnivorous Plants of Australia, Volume 2 and Volume3,** By Allen Lowrie

**Carnivorous Plants of the World** By James and Patricia Pietropaolo