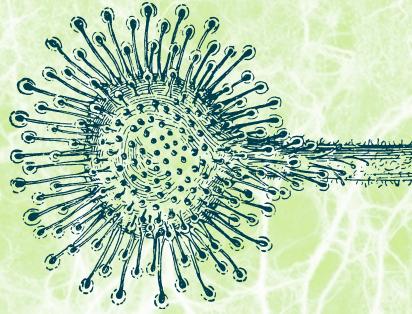


GET TO KNOW

Carnivorous Plants



What to expect from this educational packet

Get ready to explore the fascinating world of bug-eating plants and the wetlands they call home!

Through this packet, you will:

- Learn about Canada's amazing carnivorous plants and the ecosystems they depend on.
- Explore how these plants adapt to survive in nutrient-poor environments.
- Find out about cultural connections and Indigenous stewardship of wetlands.
- Do some fun activities like drawing and designing your own bug-eating plant.
- Reflect on what you've learned with discussion questions and interactive prompts.

Introduction

Carnivorous plants are some of nature's most fascinating survivors. Unlike most plants that rely solely on soil nutrients, these species have evolved to capture and digest insects to supplement their diet. Why? They live in places that are low in essential nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. Their animal-eating adaptations allow them to thrive in environments where other plants struggle, like in wetlands such as bogs and fens. In Canada, you can find carnivorous species like sundews, pitcher plants, and bladderworts. They help recycle nutrients and provide microhabitats for insects and microorganisms in their community. Protecting these plants means protecting the wetlands they call home—ecosystems that store carbon, filter water, and support countless species.

There's lots we can learn from these plants about resilience and adaptation. They remind us that life can flourish even in harsh conditions by finding creative solutions. Sundews, pitcher plants, and bladderworts show how cooperation with their environment—rather than domination—can lead to survival. Carnivorous plants also play an important role in maintaining biodiversity and supporting healthy ecosystems. By studying these plants, we gain insight into how ecosystems work and why every species, no matter how small, plays a role in the health of our planet. Their strategies for thriving in nutrient-poor soils can inspire us to think about sustainability and resourcefulness in our own lives.

What do you know about carnivorous plants?

Before we dive in, take a moment to think about what you already know. Why do you think some plants need to catch bugs? Where do you imagine these plants live? Write down your ideas below. At the end of this packet, come back and see what new things you've learned!



Meet some carnivorous plants

Sundews (*Genus Drosera*)



Sundews are small but mighty carnivorous plants that sparkle like morning dew. Their leaves are covered in red or green tentacles tipped with sticky droplets called mucilage. These droplets lure insects, which become trapped and digested by enzymes secreted by the plant. In Canada, sundews grow in nutrient-poor bogs and fens across much of the country. By capturing insects, sundews obtain nitrogen and phosphorus that are scarce in their habitat, allowing them to survive where few other plants can. They also contribute to wetland biodiversity by creating microhabitats for tiny organisms and supporting food webs in these fragile ecosystems.

Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*)



Canada's only native pitcher plant, the purple pitcher plant or northern pitcher plant, is a striking species with tubular leaves that form water-filled "pitchers." These pitchers act as traps for insects, which slip on the waxy rim and fall into the liquid inside. Downward-pointing hairs prevent escape, and digestive enzymes break down the prey, releasing nutrients the plant absorbs. Found in boggy habitats from Newfoundland and Labrador to northeastern British Columbia and even parts of the Northwest Territories, pitcher plants are perfectly adapted to Canada's acidic wetlands. Beyond their role as insect predators, they host entire mini-ecosystems inside their pitchers, where certain insects and microorganisms live and recycle nutrients. This makes them not only predators but also ecosystem engineers in wetland environments.

Common Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*)



Bladderworts are the speedsters of the plant world—their tiny underwater traps snap shut in less than 1/35th of a second! Common bladderwort is a free-floating aquatic plant found in lakes, ponds, and marshes across Canada. Instead of roots, it has finely divided stems with small bladders that create a vacuum to suck in tiny aquatic organisms like insect larvae and zooplankton. This adaptation allows bladderworts to thrive in nutrient-poor waters. Ecologically, they help control populations of microscopic organisms and provide shelter for aquatic insects and even food for waterfowl. Their presence signals a healthy wetland ecosystem, which is vital for water filtration and carbon storage.

Exploring Indigenous cultural connections

When learning about carnivorous plants and the wetlands they inhabit, it's important to recognize that these ecosystems have been cared for by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. Wetlands are not only home to unique species like sundews, pitcher plants, and bladderworts—they are also places of cultural significance, providing food, medicine, and other materials. They play a role in stories and teachings about balance and respect for the land.

Many Indigenous Nations across what is now called Canada have deep relationships with wetlands. These areas were traditionally understood as vital for water purification, wildlife habitat, and seasonal harvesting. Today, Indigenous stewardship continues to protect these ecosystems, which are threatened by drainage, development, and climate change. Learning about carnivorous plants can be an entry point to understanding the broader importance of wetlands and the knowledge systems that have sustained them for generations.

While we've shared some publicly available resources below as a starting point, it's best to engage with local Indigenous communities. Each Nation has distinct perspectives, cultures and governance systems, meaning that different communities will have different connections with wetlands and the plants that grow there. Many Nations have websites with a wealth of publicly shared knowledge that you can check out, or you could attend a public event hosted by the community. If you don't know whose territory you live on, you can visit [Native-Land.ca](https://native-land.ca) to learn more.



This next section includes website links for deeper learning. To explore these resources, please visit sierraclub.bc.ca/carnivorous-plants-resource



Teachings from the land

Wetlands are not only ecological treasures—they are cultural landscapes that have sustained Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. Across Canada, many Nations are leading efforts to protect these vital ecosystems, which are home to species like sundews, pitcher plants, and bladderworts.

One example is the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation in Manitoba, which is restoring and monitoring the Brokenhead Wetland. This area is home to rare orchids and 10 species of carnivorous plants, and it holds deep cultural significance as a source of traditional medicines and foods. The Nation combines scientific methods with Indigenous knowledge to safeguard these wetlands from threats like erosion, invasive species, and pollution. Their work ensures that rare plants—including carnivorous species—continue to thrive for future generations.

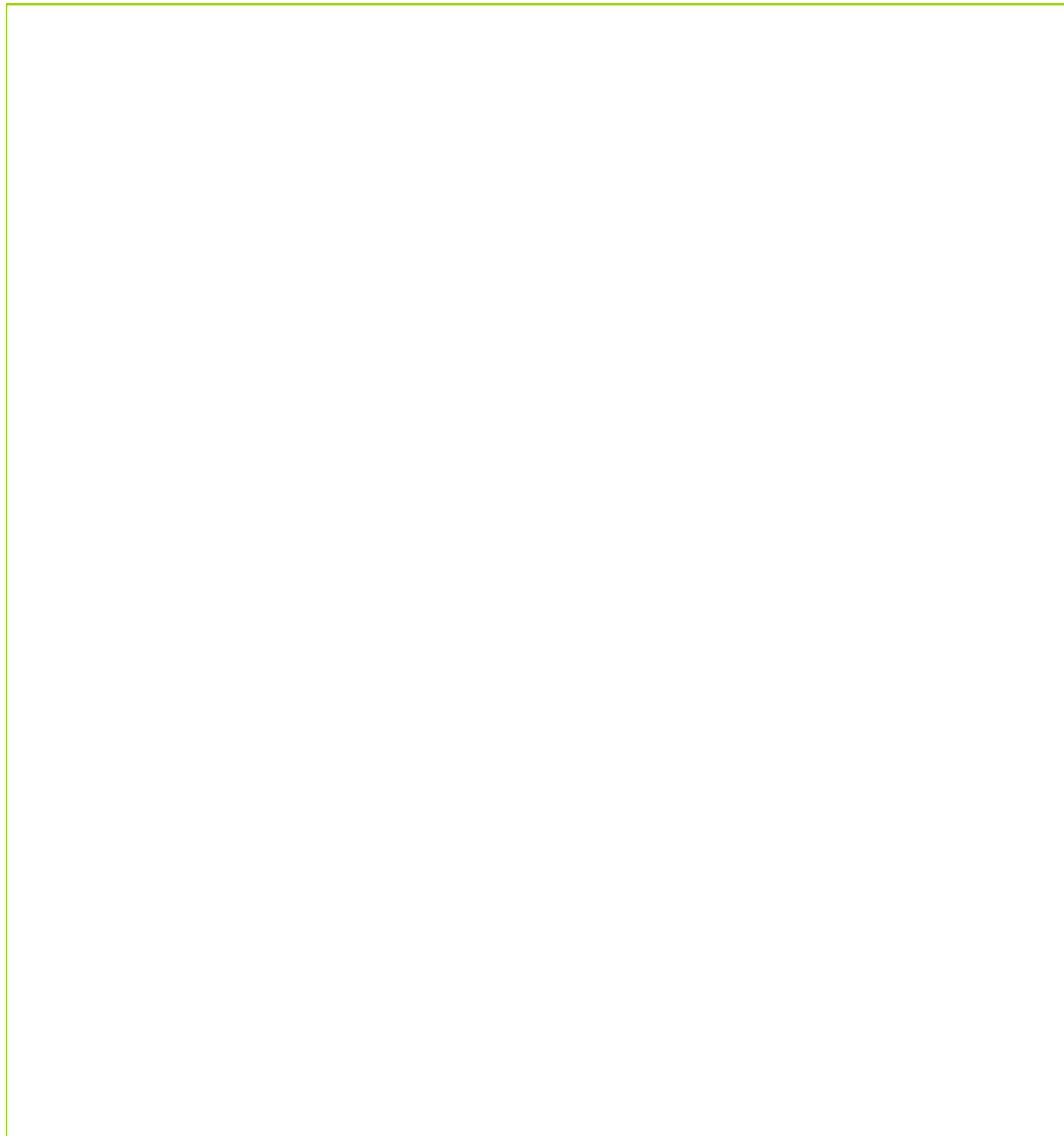
Activities

Draw a garden of carnivorous plants!

Watch a tutorial on
how to draw
carnivorous plants!



With this activity, we encourage you to draw sundews, pitcher plants or bladderworts and their habitat. If you'd like a tutorial, you can watch our *Learn to Draw Carnivorous Plants* lesson with the QR code above or visit sierraclub.bc.ca/draw.



Create Your Own Bug-Eating Plant!

Introduction:

Carnivorous plants come in amazing shapes and colors—but what if you could invent your own? In this activity, design a brand-new bug-eating plant. Think about what it looks like, how it catches prey, and where it lives.

For this activity you might want:

1. Paper, cardboard, or recycled cereal boxes
2. Markers, crayons, colored pencils, or paint
3. Scissors and glue, or tape
4. Tissue paper, aluminum foil, or fabric scraps
5. Natural materials like leaves, twigs, or pebbles
6. Stickers, googly eyes, or anything sparkly

Thinking points

- What does your plant look like? Is it tall and twisty, tiny and sneaky, or wide and colorful?
- How does it catch its “food”? Does it snap shut, drip sticky goo, glow in the dark, or sing a silly song to lure prey?
- Where does it live? A misty bog, a sunny windowsill, a rainforest canopy, or even a magical floating island?



Create your plant

- Draw your plant on paper or build it as a 3D model using your materials.
- Give it a name (the sillier or more scientific-sounding, the better!).
- Write a short “plant profile” that explains:
 - What it eats (bugs, crumbs, moonlight, raindrops, or something totally unexpected!)
 - How it catches its food
 - Where it lives and why it’s perfect for that habitat

Carnivorous Plant

WORD SEARCH

L	E	G	K	R	W	E	T	N	T	A	B	R	T	I
E	H	M	F	K	V	H	Y	E	B	N	K	F	V	P
A	C	I	D	I	C	F	L	O	A	T	I	N	G	R
A	T	K	Z	U	T	C	O	D	C	H	D	M	R	E
R	L	W	C	M	D	L	X	T	I	W	F	C	E	Y
Z	L	A	R	P	M	J	G	K	U	L	I	U	K	T
J	N	T	P	E	A	T	J	K	S	T	J	C	K	Y
X	U	E	T	T	F	X	G	V	Q	J	J	W	W	
B	J	R	E	S	I	L	I	E	N	T	O	X	J	Z
B	W	L	S	M	L	B	F	Y	I	M	B	N	J	U
E	G	O	D	H	D	M	M	H	A	B	I	T	A	T
B	G	G	X	J	G	C	U	Y	W	E	C	I	J	S
N	B	G	F	V	D	I	G	E	S	T	W	B	X	Q
W	V	E	K	R	F	E	N	P	J	B	U	B	M	X
O	H	D	X	H	M	M	U	C	I	L	A	G	E	X

Fen – A grassy wetland with moss and sedges.

Peat – Soil made from partly decayed plants in wetlands.

Sticky – How sundew leaves feel when catching bugs.

Digest – What plants do to break down their food.

Prey – The insects that carnivorous plants eat.

Habitat – The natural home of plants and animals.

Waterlogged – Soil that is soaked with water.

Acidic – The type of soil found in bogs and fens.

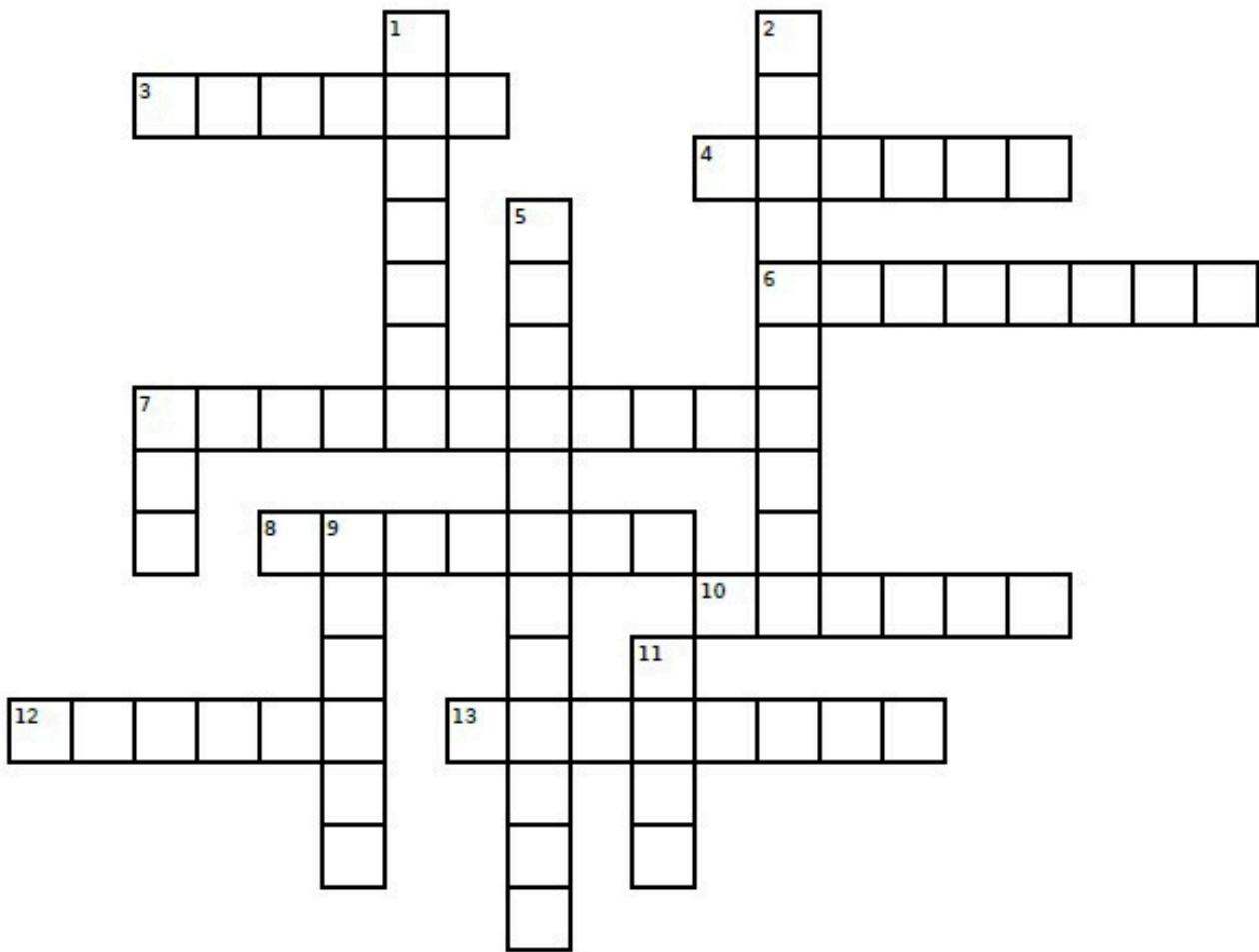
Floating – How bladderwort lives without roots.

Resilient – Able to survive in tough conditions.

Mucilage – The sticky substance on sundew tentacles.

Carnivorous Plant

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Across

3. A plant with sticky tentacles that trap insects
4. How bladderwort traps work underwater
6. Sticky structures on sundews that hold prey
7. An aquatic plant with tiny vacuum-like traps
8. A tubular leaf that holds water and catches bugs
10. A chemical that helps digest insects inside the plant
12. The color of Canada's native pitcher plant
13. A nutrient these plants get from eating insects

Down

1. A habitat where carnivorous plants thrive
2. A special feature that helps plants survive in harsh places
5. A tiny ecosystem inside a pitcher plant's leaf
7. A nutrient-poor area where sundews and pitcher plants grow
9. The main food source for carnivorous plants
11. A structure used by carnivorous plants to catch prey

1. Wetland 2. Adaptation 3. Wetland 4. Vacuum 5. Microhabitat 6. Tentacle 7. Bladderwort 8. Pitcher 9. Insect 10. Enzyme 11. Trap 12. Purple 13. Nitrogen

Discussion questions

Write down your thoughts and reflections to the questions below.

- How do you feel connected to wetlands and the unique plants that live there?
- How do wetlands help keep our environment healthy, and why are they important for carnivorous plants?
- What surprised you most about sundews, pitcher plants, or bladderworts?
- If these plants disappeared from wetlands, what do you think would happen to the ecosystem?
- What lessons can we learn from carnivorous plants about adapting to challenges?
- How can we help protect wetlands and the unique plants that live there?

Keep learning with us!

We want to express our sincere gratitude to all those who helped breathe life into this work.

To explore our resource list and additional learning materials, we invite you to visit sierraclub.bc.ca/carnivorous-plants-resource

