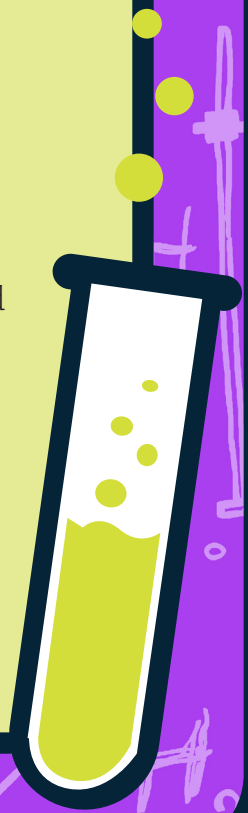
UNLOCKING SCIENCE HANDS ON!

RESCUING A CURSED PLANT

There are many varieties of carnivorous plants that eat bugs. Pitcher plants set a pit trap with their sweet nectar. Sundews offer a sweet treat that traps the unsuspecting fly. Venus flytraps lure their prey right into their leafy jaws and suck the life out of them. People have long been fascinated with these bug-eating plants. They were a favorite subject of Charles Darwin. Unlike his evolutionary ideas, his descriptions of carnivorous plants were beneficial to scientific study.

If you have ever tried to grow one of these plants, you may not have gotten traps big enough to eat the neighbor's cat, but they can be beautiful and entertaining. But they are tricky to grow, and there are many misconceptions about how they grow best and how to treat them. This activity will help you rescue and care for your little green friend.

Extra Family Fun: Take a trip to the local greenhouse or garden store and purchase a carnivorous plant that needs to be rescued. Come up with a fun name for your plant.



Repotting Rescue

Supplies

- Venus flytrap or other carnivorous plant
- 4-inch or larger plastic pot
- Sphagnum peat moss with no fertilizers or additives
- Perlite
- Water (distilled, reverse osmosis, or rain)
- Gallon zipper bag
- Deep saucer or bowl
- Optional: waterproof gloves (latex, vinyl, rubber)

The plants that you buy from the typical garden store usually come packaged in pots that are too small and packages that will overheat the plant. One of the best things you can do to help the plant flourish is to give it a new home with lots of space, fresh air, sunshine, and pure water.

Repotting Procedure

1 Carefully remove the potted plant from the box/package, being careful not to accidentally slice off any leaves. Use a pair of scissors to cut away the sections of the package if needed. Set aside once plant has been removed from the packaging.

2 Add about 3 cups of sphagnum peat moss and 3 cups of perlite to the baggie. Seal and shake until evenly mixed.

3 Add about 3 cups of water, seal, and knead gently until the contents feel somewhat like cookie dough. (Add a bit more water as needed.) You want the mixture to be dampened thoroughly but not sopping wet.

4 Fill the new pot with the moistened soil mixture and poke a hole about two inches deep in the center with your finger.

5 Take potted flytrap and turn it on its side and gently squeeze the sides of the pot, rotating as you do so. This will loosen the soil from the pot. You can tap it on your palm as well. Don't worry if some traps snap shut in the process. They'll reopen later.

6 Pop out the entire ball of soil with the plant. Then widen and deepen the hole you've poked in the soil in the new pot just enough so the plant will drop in easily.

7 Press the soil along the edges inward until the plant is snuggly in place.

8 Add additional soil until the pot is filled to the brim around the plant.

9 Place the newly potted plant in a saucer or bowl and keep the water level ¼ to ⅓ up the side of the pot at all times. Keep the plant in an area with lots of sunlight and keep it watered well.

10 Flytraps live in areas where they go through a dormant period, so the plant should be brought into a garage or similar area during the winter months so it can be dormant. Water with a little water every few weeks. You can learn a lot more about flytrap care in the *Unlocking Science* episodes "Cursed Plants: Flytraps" and "Hands On: Rescuing a Cursed Plant" or by purchasing the book *How to Grow the Coolest Plant in the World: The Venus Fly-trap!* by Ron Dudek.

Questions and Discussion

1 What is the only soil that should be used to grow flytaps? *Sphagnum peat moss. This is the soil in which they grow naturally in the Carolinas. It is acidic and low in nutrients such as nitrogen.*

2 Why shouldn't MiracleGro® brand peat moss or brands with added fertilizers be used when potting Venus flytraps? *MiracleGro® and other products are enriched with nutrients (such as nitrogen) which are toxic to Venus flytraps. Their roots are adapted to an acidic, low nutrient environment.*

3 What is the benefit of adding perlite to the sphagnum peat moss? *Perlite adds no nutrients to the soil and helps water and oxygen to penetrate the sphagnum peat moss and retain moisture.*

4 Name the three types of water that should be used for Venus flytraps. *Distilled, reverse-osmosis filtered, or rain.*

5 How often should flytraps be repotted? *When they are first purchased and every 2–3 years.*

6 On what day of creation did God make Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, and sundews? *All plants were created on day 3 of creation week as described in Genesis 1:11–13.*

7 When these plants were originally created, did they eat insects? *It seems to contradict the text to say that these plants were originally created to eat insects since that would involve the death of a creature, something that would have been absent in God's original, perfect creation. It must have been sometime after the fall into sin that such behaviors arose in plants and animals.*

And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. Genesis 1:11 (ESV)

