

# Pretty as a pitcher *Carol Rouse*

‘*Fifth!*’ exclaimed R, as I explained that he’d moved down again in the league table of my affections behind the cat, my ipad and chocolate. Wondering what or who this fourth favourite might be he grudgingly admitted to himself that Bradley Wiggins *might* be a worthy opponent given his recent Tour de France and Olympic successes. Or, if it were George Clooney, then yes, he probably was marginally more good looking - but not much.

‘It’s my new *Sarracenia*’, I said excitedly, ‘You know the one I bought at the Malvern Show.’  
‘What, that pipe thing with a lid on it - well at least it’s animate’ he said, still smarting at the indignity of being ousted by the supremacy of Apple technology. He stomped off to his shed leaving me to fuss over my new prized possession.

The floral marquee at Malvern had hosted a splendid display of these insectivorous pitcher plants. They looked mildly extra-terrestrial with their throats snaking skywards, mouths open to engulf the unwary. In their surroundings of soft mosses and damp soil there was something slightly predatory in their stillness, a waiting, a slyness almost. Pitcher plants like the *Sarracenia* trap flies and other insects by providing nectar which is secreted around the rim of the plant and also at the base of the lid. Landing insects drink the nectar, which contains a chemical that intoxicates them. The lip rim is also slippery and smooth and once insects are ‘drunk’ they easily fall in to the tube which narrows toward the base. Once inside there is no way out as the downward pointing hairs in the tube of the pitcher prevent their escape back up. When the insect reaches the bottom it is dissolved by enzymes and the nutrient value is absorbed by the plant - the proverbial sticky end, in fact.

But surely these things are difficult to grow? They must need heat, humidity, kid glove treatment, constant attention? Apparently not. As I read the brief growing instructions they began to sound like my kind of plant: just keep their feet wet, no special feeding, hardy down to minus 7, just stand back and admire. After Malvern, I decided that my little friend needed a companion and thanks to ‘Flytrappin’ Jim’ on Ebay I acquired a few more.

So, how to display my treasures? Our pond is now quite mature and landscaped but there was a bit to the side of one of the little cascades that we weren’t



sure how to finish and we were waiting for some inspiration or suggestion from friends. Suddenly I knew what was needed. I built a circular construction roughly 18 inches in diameter and about 6 or 7 inches high with Cotswold stone and spread leftover pond liner in the bottom. I diverted some pond water via a carefully hidden pipe and played around with the water level until it was about 2 to 3 inches deep and maintained this level allowing the remainder to overflow back into the main pond.

I had also been bringing on some *Zantedeschia*; two 'Calla Picasso' which were white with burgundy insides and two 'Calla Yellow'. These also like water and some can be grown as marginals. Although not sure if the ones I had were of the marginal tolerant variety, I placed the callas in their pots in this 'micro pond' and interspersed them with the sarracenias. Finally, I hid the top of the pots with large pebbles being careful not to let the stones touch the plants for fear that, should we eventually get some sun this summer, the stones would heat up and scorch the tender stems. The end result was exotic and quite spectacular against the various greens of the conifers and heathers that surround the rest of the pond. I shall have to dismantle the arrangement later in the year to overwinter both types of plant. It has been an interesting experiment and the callas have certainly flowered their socks off, probably due to the nutrient rich pond water.

When I had finished R emerged from his shed and was generous with his praise, having come to terms with his new positioning in the favouritism league and no doubt pleased that at least he figured higher than bindweed, ground elder and that pretty but intensely invasive red leaf form of oxalis.

*Carol Rouse gardens in Cirencester, Gloucestershire.*