

Live Free and Dig

with the Littleton Garden Club

Mud Pond Trail & Carnivorous Wonders

BY MARY BINGMAN

Littleton Garden Club

Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge in Jefferson is a nearby destination for those seeking time in nature. The Mud Pond Trail is a very short trail in that network. It's rich in ecological intrigue and accessible to all, thanks to a four and a half foot wide raised boardwalk leading to a pond.

The trail meanders through a forested area of northern white cedar and black spruce. It manages to preserve delicate plant communities and has a treat for visitors at the end of the trail.

Considered a botanical highlight: three species of carnivorous plants coexist there by the water.

Pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts thrive in the nutrient-poor, wet

habitat. They capture insects for extra sustenance.

Carnivorous plants can photosynthesize and are found in wetlands or aquatic environments. Some of their nutrients may be in scarce supply. Carnivorous plants are generally unable to obtain enough nutrients from the soil or water to grow robustly. These plants have evolved traps to capture small animals for food. These are mostly modified leaves, or modified parts of leaves. Captured prey get digested in the traps and remaining nutrients are absorbed and used by the plant to support growth and development.

I learned that five types of carnivorous plants are found in New England — sundews, waterwheel plants, pitcher plants,

bladderworts, and butterworts. Sundews and pitcher plants occur in peat-lands; waterwheel plants and bladderworts are aquatic species found in a range of freshwater environments; and butterworts occur in wet, rocky, boreal and sub-alpine habitats. They are all native to New England except for the waterwheel plant. That plant was introduced, and is now considered invasive here.

Most people associate carnivorous plants with the Venus Flytrap which is native to specific habitats in the Coastal Plain and certain regions of North and South Carolina. Bogs, and areas with moist, acidic soils are found there. These environments are important as they provide nutrients the plant needs from the insects it traps.

We may not have Venus flytraps growing nearby but hybrid varieties can be found in specialty nurseries or locations such as Gardener's Supply in Lebanon. Children may enjoy learning about these curious plants.

The next time you are looking for a short nature walk, consider the Mud pond trail. Try to spot a pitcher plant or a sundew as you glance down from the boardwalk. They are a rare visual treat to enjoy in addition to photographing a passing bird or two above the water.

The Littleton Garden Club is dedicated to civic beautification, accepts new members from around the area and remains a very active group. To learn more, visit our Web site at:

<https://www.littletonnhgardenclub.org>.