

Cultivation guidelines

KEY CONSIDERATIONS: Growing *Dionaea*

LOCATION: Terrarium, greenhouse, outside
TEMPERATURE: See table 8.1
HUMIDITY: 50–80 percent
LIGHT PROVISION: Full sun
PLANTING MEDIA: 1:1 sand:peat mix
WINTER DORMANCY: Yes



SAVING ENERGY Flower buds protruding from *Dionaea* rosettes (above) should be removed as soon as they are seen.

Where to grow *Dionaea*

Whether you should try to grow this plant outside, under lights, in a greenhouse, in a bottle terrarium, or simply on a windowsill, is something you must assess knowing your own conditions and the plant's requirements. Growers in areas that have climates very similar to the south-central Atlantic coast of the United States will find cultivating *Dionaea* straightforward, but most of us cannot rely upon such climatic help. The effort involved in successfully growing *Dionaea* is like that of maintaining a tropical aquarium: work is involved in setting up the growing area, but once that is done the upkeep is minimal. The Golden Rules (see page 170) provide an excellent guide, but basically you are aiming to replicate the conditions near Wilmington, North Carolina, as closely as possible (see table 8.1). If you are unsuccessful, take heart in the fact that Darwin couldn't grow *Dionaea*, either!

How to look after *Dionaea*

Dionaea requires full sun, and not providing enough light is why most people are not successful in growing it. With only a 50 percent decrease in sunlight, *Dionaea* flowers less, has weaker leaf structure, and shows more damage from insects.

A 1:1 sand:peat soil mix is appropriate, although other carnivorous plant mixes will work as well. Use plastic pots at least 2 inches (5 centimeters) in diameter, set in trays filled at all times with an inch or so (a few centimeters) of purified water. Humidity should be 50–80 percent. *Dionaea* is not too particular about temperature, but an optimal summer range is 68–82 degrees F (20–28 degrees C). As you can see from

table 8.1, these plants expect a cool winter. If you try to grow *Dionaea* continuously without providing winter dormancy, your plants are likely to languish. Storing *Dionaea* in your refrigerator for a few months may be the only option for growers in tropical climates.

Remove flower stalks whenever they form, because the energy to create them is usually too draining for cultivated plants and the flowers are not particularly attractive.

Propagation is best done by leaf pullings. Bury the bottom third of the leaf pulling in planting medium, and maintain high humidity and sunlight. Plantlets should sprout from the white base of the leaf within a month. If you wish to grow plants from seed, stratify the seed for four weeks, then treat the seedlings as mature plants. The plantlets will require a few years to reach maturity. Pests should be removed manually whenever possible.

Table 8.1: Temperatures in Wilmington, North Carolina

Month	Average high	Average low	Mean
January	55°F (13°C)	34°F (1°C)	45°F (7°C)
February	58°F (14°C)	36°F (2°C)	47°F (8°C)
March	65°F (18°C)	43°F (6°C)	54°F (12°C)
April	74°F (23°C)	50°F (10°C)	62°F (17°C)
May	80°F (27°C)	59°F (15°C)	70°F (21°C)
June	85°F (29°C)	67°F (19°C)	77°F (25°C)
July	88°F (31°C)	71°F (22°C)	80°F (27°C)
August	87°F (31°C)	71°F (22°C)	79°F (26°C)
September	85°F (29°C)	65°F (18°C)	75°F (24°C)
October	76°F (24°C)	53°F (12°C)	65°F (18°C)
November	69°F (21°C)	45°F (7°C)	57°F (14°C)
December	59°F (15°C)	37°F (3°C)	49°F (9°C)

How to feed *Dionaea*

Dionaea benefits from feeding, and a well-grown plant appreciates a few meals every month of the growing season. Use insects no larger than about one third as long as the trap. Do not feed your plant inappropriate food such as meat, as it is likely to result in a bacterial invasion that will kill the leaf.

The easiest way to finagle a lively insect into a *Dionaea* trap is to chill (not kill) the insect in a pot in the freezer until it is nearly immobile. Drop the insect into the trap, and trigger it closed. Make sure none of the bug's parts are sticking out of the trap. When the insect revives, its explorations inside the trap will stimulate the plant into the slow closure phase and then digestion.

If you feed dead insects to your plant, you will need to probe between the loosely closed jaws of the trap to stimulate the trigger hairs and induce digestion. Gently squeezing the trap a few times can also work.

The leaves of poorly grown plants may blacken and rot if fed. This will not damage the rest of your plant, but it is a warning that your cultivation methods need some improvement.

Cultivars

Many *Dionaea* cultivars have been registered with the International Carnivorous Plant Society; some of the most noteworthy are listed below with short descriptions.

***Dionaea* 'Akai Ryu':** Also known as *Dionaea* 'Red Dragon,' this plant has wonderful deep red coloration throughout its leaves.

***Dionaea* 'B52':** A new cultivar name for a plant with vigorous growth and brightly colored traps that are up to 2.25 inches (5.7 centimeters) long in conditions that yield smaller traps in most other strains. It was germinated and named by Henning von Schmeling. This prosaic cultivar name comes from Von Schmeling's system of designating plants in his breeding program.

***Dionaea* 'Clayton's Red Sunset':** This is similar to *Dionaea* 'Red Dragon,' but has only narrow-petioled leaves and a slightly different color.

TRAP EXPLOSION *Dionaea* 'B52' has good coloration and enormous traps which grow up to 2.25 inches (5.7 centimeters) long.

