

Sarracenia Winter Maintenance



Figure 1. Don't panic! Brown patches developing on the pitcher walls in the summer is perfectly normal.

As the days again shorten, the leaves of the Sarracenia begin to die back. In *S. oreophila* this can be as early as late summer, especially if it's exceptionally hot, whereas others such as *S. minor*, *leucophylla*, and *rubra* can retain their leaves a good way through the winter. When they do begin to die back, the first indication are brown patches on the sides of the leaves where the insects within are broken down. Don't be alarmed at this, it is quite natural and is followed by a browning of the lid which then extends down along the length of the leaf.

At this juncture there is a call to action, and the commencement of the most important task of the year.

For most of the upright species and hybrids, it's simply a case of waiting until the leaves have died three

quarters along their length from the top downwards, and with a pair of sharp secateurs or scissors remove the dead section. Leave a couple of inches of the green base on the plant.

If you prefer, you can remove the leaves a little at a time as they brown, as the



Figure 2. By early autumn many of the pitchers are dying back

remaining green base will be of use to the plant, but this is not essential, or indeed practical if you have a number of plants.

Once the leaves are removed you are left with a selection of green leaf bases from those just cut, and a number of dead bases from the previous year's surgery.

These brown stems need to be removed as they are now likely to attract attack from grey mould.



Figure 3. If you have a number of plants, it's often easier to remove the leaves near to their bases.



Figure 4. Old leaf bases which will be left from the previous year can now be removed.

Holding the base of the plant pull each of these out in turn. You will notice that the base detaches from the rhizome cleanly with the flared joint where it was attached.

Not only is this good practice as it prevents disease attack, it also encourages the rhizome to produce off-shoots, as each leaf has at its base a dormant lateral bud which will often begin to grow once exposed.

Species such as *S. leucophylla* and *S. rubra* and their sub-species and varieties will lose their spring leaves in the autumn, and their summer leaves will remain green and live on the plant well into the winter. Just remove the dying

leaves as described above, leaving those still in good condition to enjoy a little longer.

S. flava and *S. oreophila* will produce winter leaves, or to give them their correct name, phyllodes. These are produced at the end of the growth cycle and are non-carnivorous. In *S. flava* they are sword shaped and upright, and in *S. oreophila* they are sickle shaped and recumbent, arching over with their tips often touching the soil.

These structures can be left on the plant. In the case of *S. oreophila*, the pitchers will die back completely to their bases and it is

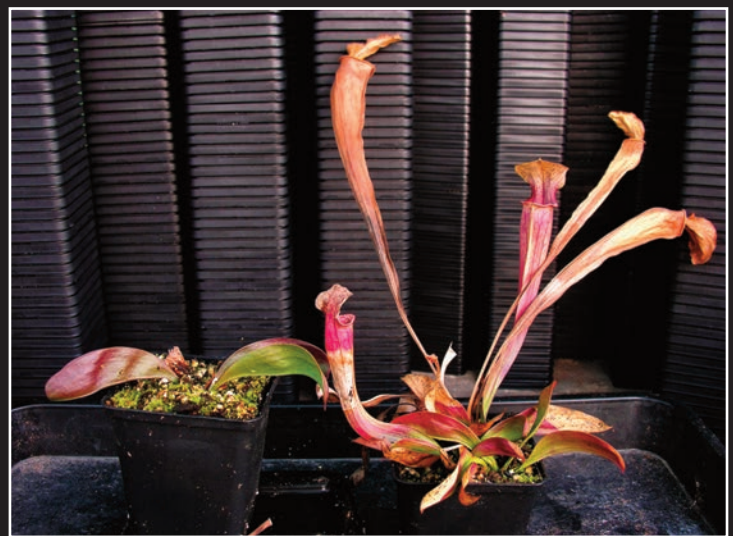


Figure 5. In the case of *S. oreophila*, the pitcher dies back to its base (right) and the whole leaf can be pulled out, leaving the sickle shaped winter leaves (left).

simply a case pulling them out by hand, holding the base of the plant to ensure you don't rip it from its pot.

With *S. flava* you can cut the leaves down as described above, leaving the phyllodes intact. If they are removed inadvertently however, there is no detriment to the plant. Cut off *S. flava* pitchers, leaving the phyllodes.



Figure 6. Cut off *S. flava* pitchers (right), leaving the phyllodes (left).

Some species retain their leaves until the following spring, and the best time to tackle these species and hybrids is to remove the leaves as they die back. *S. minor* can simply be cut back as the new leaves emerge, though this is often whilst the previous season's leaves are still very much green.

The squat *S. purpurea* is best left until its leaves have died back completely, and then carefully pulled away, holding the base of the plant so as to avoid breaking the fragile rhizome.

The final species, *S. psittacina*, is treated in the same way, pulling the old leaves from the base when they have died back completely.



Figure 7. In the case of *S. purpurea*, the leaves can be left until they die back completely.

that is in harsh greenhouse or outdoor conditions, they are much tougher than you would imagine, and will shock you no doubt the first time your precious plants are found under a covering of snow.

Naturally, plants that live their lives permanently out of doors will have a shorter growing season than those afforded even the protection of an unheated greenhouse, and you will find that the subtle differences in the time at which flowers are produced in a greenhouse, as opposed to outside, demonstrates this.

In slightly warmer environments, and certainly in their native habitat, the spring will be heralded by the return of warm weather which will then prevail, enabling the plants to commence growth unimpeded by further sudden drops in temperature which will stall growth once again, something we certainly see in the UK.

The many hybrids will follow one of the patterns above, a characteristic they inherit from one or other of their parents, so with these it's simply a case of keeping an eye on the plant and observing how it behaves in its first season.

Now allow them to rest somewhere cold. If they are under cover keep them damp rather than wet, and if they are in an entirely unventilated environment, a spray with a fungicide may be a good idea, in an ounce of prevention way. Do keep an occasional eye on them though, as the effects of drying out can be surprisingly sudden and un-noticed at this time of year, but can be deadly.

If your plants are outside don't be concerned when it becomes cold. If they are hard grown,

© Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, March 2021.

