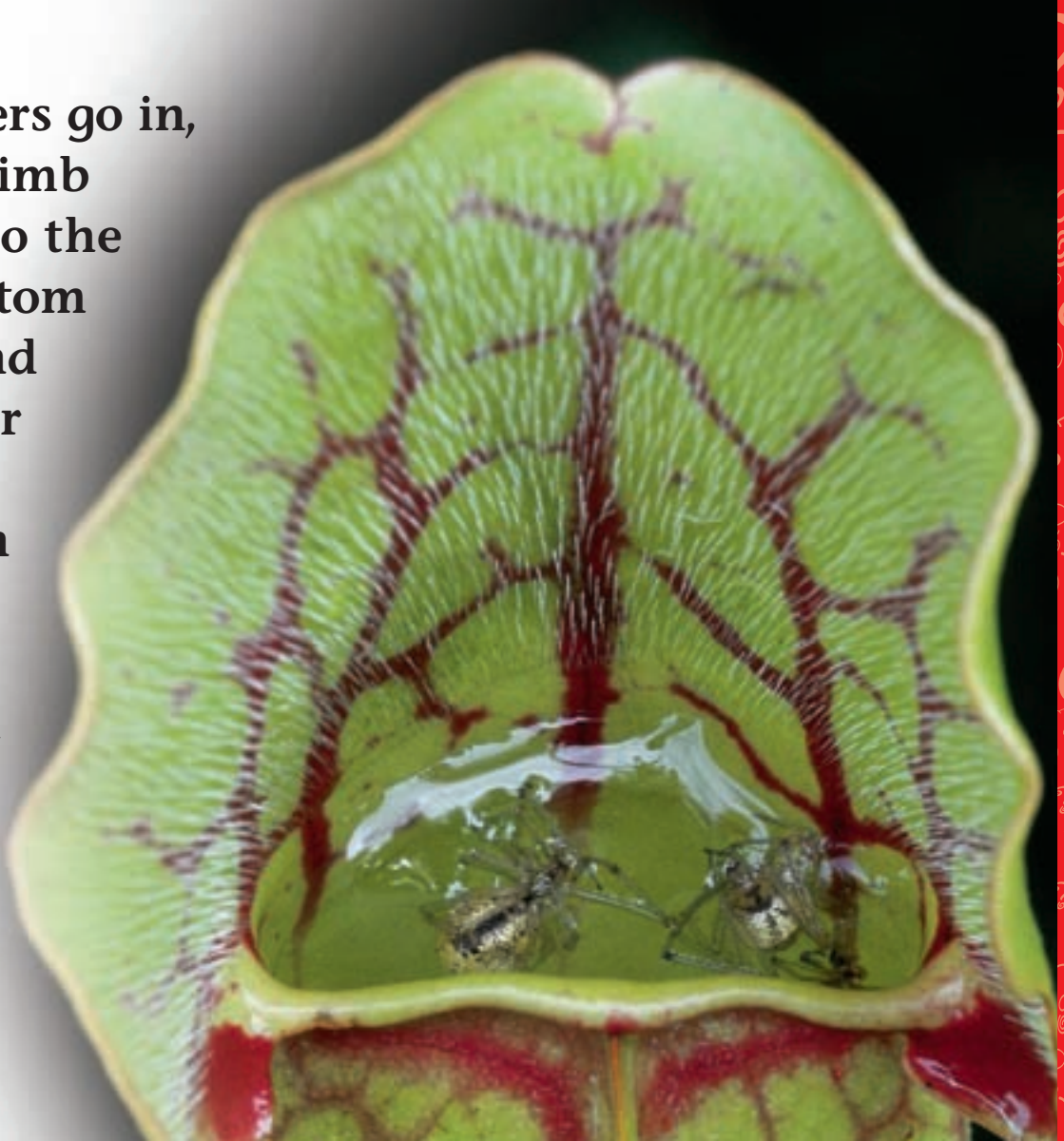
How & Why Plants Eat Insects

Pitcher plants poke up from the damp ground. You can see how they got their name: Each plant has a little pitcher that holds water. Pitcher plants are even stranger than they seem. These plants eat insects!

A frog visits the pitcher plants. The frog and the plants are waiting for the same thing—a tasty insect meal.

Insects and spiders crawl into the pitcher in search of food. But the inside of the pitcher is slippery and lined with tiny spines. All the spines point down.

Insects and spiders go in, but they can't climb out. They fall into the water at the bottom of the pitcher and drown. The water is full of juices that break down their bodies. The water becomes a sort of soup, and the plant soaks up its meal.



Sundews grow in boggy places where the soil is poor. Like other insect-eating plants, sundews need more nourishment than they can get from the soil. They get what they need from insects.

The sundew sets a sweet trap. This plant's leaves are covered with reddish hairs. The hairs are coated with sticky juice.

The sundew's juice smells sweet, so a flower fly comes to drink. But the juice is so sticky that the flower fly can't leave. The sundew is like a living piece of flypaper! As the fly struggles, the sundew's sticky hairs bend to hold it tight. The hairs begin to make digestive juices. In a few days, only the shell of the flower fly is left.

The Venus flytrap traps flies with a snap! This plant's leaves look almost like flowers. They are shiny and red inside, and they have lots of sweet nectar.

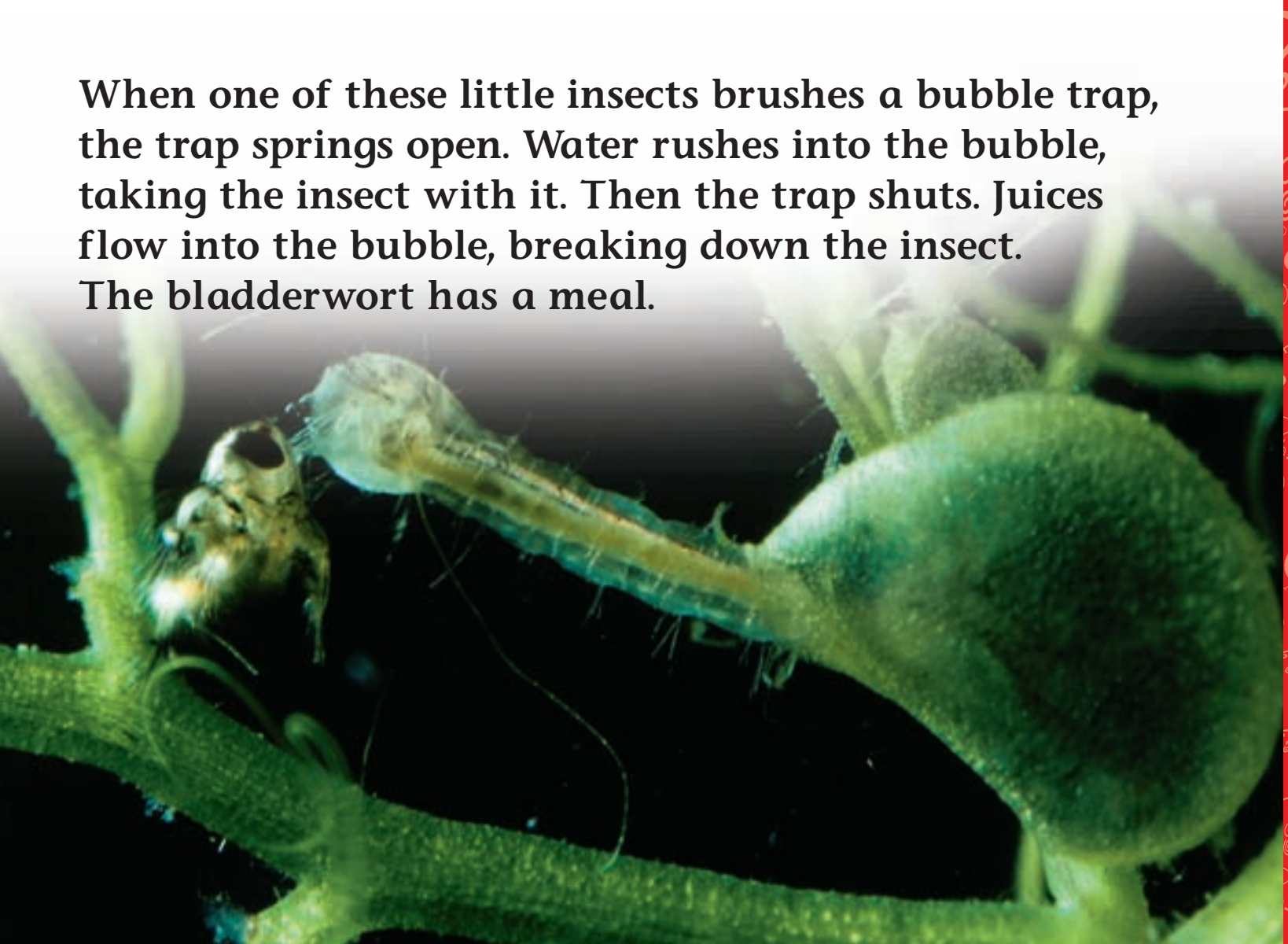
Each leaf has a fringe of delicate spines. The spines are very important to the Venus flytrap. They tell the plant when a meal arrives.

A damselfly comes to a Venus flytrap, searching for nectar. It lands on a leaf and brushes special trigger hairs.

Snap! The leaf folds closed, trapping the damselfly. Juices flow from the leaf, breaking down the damselfly's body. The leaf will not open until it has soaked up its insect meal.

Bladderworts grow in ponds, below the water. This plant is covered with tiny air-filled sacs. They look like bubbles, but they are traps. Water fleas, mosquito larvae, and other tiny water insects come to the plant, looking for food.

When one of these little insects brushes a bubble trap, the trap springs open. Water rushes into the bubble, taking the insect with it. Then the trap shuts. Juices flow into the bubble, breaking down the insect. The bladderwort has a meal.



Use the information in this book to answer some "how and why" questions.

- How did the pitcher plant get its name?
- Why do insects crawl into a pitcher plant?
- Why do sundews and other insect-eating plants need nourishment from insects?
- Why can't insects leave a sundew leaf once they land?
- How does the Venus flytrap catch insects?
- How does the bladderwort use water to catch insects?