

Ask a Master Gardener
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Bog Gardens

Q. I overheard some people discussing bog gardens and pitcherplants the other day, but only heard part of the conversation. I thought bogs were wet, soggy places where little grows. What is a bog garden, what grows in one and what in the world is a pitcher plant? Diane T.

A. Bogs and especially pitcher plant bogs are extraordinary places. Recently, I was very lucky to hear a presentation on bogs, pitcherplants and pitcherplant bogs by Jenifer Ceska of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia and most of what I know comes from her excellent presentation.

Bogs, as they occur in nature, are not spooky, dead areas of stagnant water. Actually they are acidic, nutrient poor areas with a source of slowly moving water that usually comes from spring heads. Many, especially along the Coastal Plain, are wildflower meadows that are filled with color and life. Pitcherplants are commonly found in these bogs, along with wildflowers, orchids, grasses and sedges.

Pitcherplants (*Sarracenia*) are unusual, beautiful and misunderstood carnivorous plants. Because the soil is so nutrient poor they depend on catching insects for food. Even though they are carnivorous which conjures up visions of the plants reaching out and grabbing any living thing that comes by, they are passive feeders that sit and wait for their prey to fall into their trap. They have modified leaves that are formed into the shape of a pitcher and are lined with nectar glands at the opening to attract insects to the mouth of the pitcher. Once inside stiff, downward pointing hairs force the insects to the bottom of the pitcher where they are digested. Although their main diet is insects, the remains of small frogs and lizards have been found in the pitchers.

Georgia has three types of wild bogs: Coastal Plain, Piedmont and Mountain bogs. All are threatened habitats. The Coastal Plain bogs once covered thousands of Georgia acres, but are now limited to a small number of tiny pockets and few Mountain bogs remain. Natural bogs depend on being

burned periodically to survive, so the suppression of burning, draining their habitats, and chemical runoff have endangered our bogs. Georgia has the only bogs where more than one species of pitcherplant is found in a single bog. All of Georgia's bogs are protected by the State and most can only be visited by special permission or limited organized tours.

An exception to this is the Doerun Bog in Colquitt County in southwest Georgia between Moultrie and Doerun. It covers over 651 acres and has about 100 acres of beautiful pitcherplant bog habitat. The bog is protected by raised wooden walkways that protect the habitat while allowing visitors a good view of the plants. Three types of pitcherplants are found in the bog: hooded, parrot, and yellow flytrap. The best times to visit are late March through April when all of the pitcherplants bloom and late September through October when the grasses and fall wildflowers are at their peak.

While I don't know of any natural bogs in our area, we can enjoy a bog or several in our own back yards. They can be created either in the ground with the help of a liner, or in containers. We don't have room for details here, but briefly, based on a plan designed by the Atlanta Botanical Garden, materials needed to plant a bog in the ground are: pond or roofing liner; river sand; peat moss (milled sphagnum moss); soaker hose; shovels; small rocks (pebbles); large rocks or logs; and a measuring tape or yard stick. The area needs to be in full sun, a western exposure is best. The hole should be at least 5 X 7 feet and 18 inches deep. You need to line the hole; add sand; add peat; firm the bog; water it; add a drainage system; protect it from runoff from surrounding areas; and plant. Walter Reeves suggests using: pitcherplants, yellow flag iris, dwarf papyrus, arrowhead, sundrop, turtlehead, dwarf cattail, lamium, astilbe, ferns, dwarf hosta, dwarf canna, and elephant ear.

For a container bog the Mississippi Extension suggests using a container at least eight inches deep and 12 inches wide, and a soil mixture of 80% coarse peat moss and 20% sharp sand. They also suggest placing a saucer filled with water under the container to keep the area humid.

If you want to build your own bog, you can find more information at the Endangered Plant Stewardship Network website: EPSN.org and the Walter Reeves website.

For more information on bog gardening or answers to any other gardening questions, contact a Master Gardener Extension Volunteer at 770-836-8546, via e-mail at ccmg@uga.edu or visit our office in the Ag Center at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.