



Nepenthes (Climbing pitcher plant)



Nepenthes (also known as Climbing Pitcher Plant or Tropical Pitcher Plant) are perennial climbing vines that form an unusual but attractive pitcher on a tendril at the end of each leaf that lures, catches and digests insects and small animals.

Nepenthes produce two types of pitchers: first the lower pitchers, and then as the vines grow longer they produce the differently-shaped upper pitchers on each new leaf.

Vines can be pruned to keep it neat and compact

whenever the stem(s) get too long. New shoots will grow from the nearest dormant bud. There are two side benefits to this apart from keeping your plant a manageable size: the pruned stems can be used as cuttings to propagate new plants and the smaller, compact plant will produce more lower pitchers which are usually more colourful than the upper ones.

Flowers are produced at the growing point of the vine and are plain, small and insignificant. They should be pruned off to encourage leaf and trap production.

Plants can be potted in a large (150-200mm) hanging pot and allowed to hang over the edge, or in a standard pot with one or more stakes to support the stem(s).

Distribution and habitat

Nepenthes are found throughout most of south-east Asia and extending to Madagascar in the East, New Caledonia in the West and Cape York Australia in the south.

Species and hybrids native to mid- or high-altitude habitats are most suitable for temperate Australian climates.

Light

Bright filtered light is optimal for *Nepenthes*. The preferred conditions are similar to those for many ferns and orchids.

Temperature

Nepenthes prefer a warm (not less than 5 to 10°C overnight) and humid environment. In warm frost-free areas they can be grown outside in a shade house or other protected areas such as verandas, pergolas or under trees. In cold or frosty areas *Nepenthes* should be grown indoors in bright and humid locations such as sunrooms, bathrooms, kitchens or laundries or in a heated glass house (5-10°C minimum overnight). Avoid drying heat sources or draughts.

Water

Nepenthes require warmth, good light and high humidity to grow well and form pitchers. The potting mix should never be allowed to dry out and should be kept moist at all times without being soggy. Sitting the pots in a water tray is not recommended as it may lead to root rot. You can increase the humidity around the plant by sitting the pot over a water tray filled with pebbles so that the pot is on the pebbles rather than in the water. Some of the smaller varieties of *Nepenthes* can also be grown in a terrarium.

Fertilizer

Nepenthes may be fertilised using slow release pellets suitable for orchids or a high nitrogen foliar fertilizer. Use any fertiliser sparingly, usually only ¼ the manufacturer's recommended rate. It is best to err on the side of caution than to overfeed, as overfeeding may stop your plants from producing pitchers and could even kill your plant. The best option is to let your plant catch its own food.

Growing media

The potting mix should be acidic and free-draining, yet able to retain adequate moisture. Many growers use a 50/50 mix of *Cymbidium* orchid mix (without added fertiliser) and *Sphagnum* moss. Some growers use other various combinations of *Sphagnum* moss, moss peat, composted pine bark, perlite, and coarse washed river sand with success. (pre-soak mix at least 24 hrs before use to ensure that it is thoroughly wet and at the right pH).

Dormancy

Nepenthes do not have a dormancy period.

Propagation

1. Seed.
2. Stem cuttings.

Common pests and diseases

1. Fungal disease.

It is normal for old leaves and traps to die as the vine grows. To keep the plant looking tidy and to lessen the chances of fungal disease periodically cut off dead traps and leaves leaving the live parts intact.

When to repot

When the plant appears to be outgrowing its pot, or when the potting media appears to be deteriorating.

Credits:

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