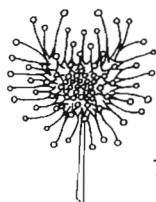


The Savage Garden

"Mini-Bogs"



by
Peter D'Amato
California Carnivores
7020 Trenton-Healdsburg Road
Forestville, CA 95436
(707) 838-1630

When hobbyists think Of bog gardens, they often envision a large hole in the ground lined with sheet plastic, filled with peat, and planted with hundreds of carnivores. Large bog gardens can be a joy, but they can also be a headache, requiring lots of maintenance, water, space and plants

I prefer the mini-bog. Small containers are moveable, manageable, affordable. And they can be a surprisingly attractive addition to a greenhouse, deck or patio, requiring much less work and watering than a large, in-the-ground bog garden.

Containers: A mini-bog can be set up in an assortment Of non-draining containers, from large glass salad bowls (see photo) to plastic bus-boy dish pans. But if watering is a hassle, think ahead. These containers will hold only a limited amount of water, and in hot, dry conditions may require watering practically every day. That's fine if you're confined to your house or have a dependable person around to water your plants while you're away. But a two week vacation can put an end to your garden if you don't have that dependable person and we all know how well non-enthusiasts are at maintaining our precious plants!

An easy solution is a sort of "island bog". These days a wide assortment of plastic garden containers are available on the market. Nurseries and garden centers offer many types of circular and rectangular plastic containers in a wide assortment of colors and sizes, such as the imitation terra-cotta plastic bowls that vaguely look like clay.

Look for the plastic containers with removable drainage-plug holes in the bottom. In fact, look for two containers, one smaller and the other larger. The smaller will hold the actual mini-bog. The larger will be the water bowl. A 14" bowl will sit rather comfortably into a 20" bowl, allowing for a considerable amount of water to entirely encircle your mini-bog, like a "moat". An even larger water bowl will further reduce watering-stress.

There are three benefits to this system. The first of course is a plentiful water supply. The second is that the water moat will prevent slugs, snails and earwigs from attacking your plants. The third is that you can grow aquatic bladderworts or waterwheel plants or tadpoles in the large moat of water.

Of course, you'll want to remove the plug in the drainage hole of the smaller container that will hold the soil and plants. Leave the plug in the larger bowl that will serve as the water reservoir.

Soils: It is easy to set up the mini-bog itself, whether you use the island method or not. For the island bog, place a large wad of long-fibered sphagnum moss over the unplugged hole. This will prevent your soil from escaping and turning your bog into a sinkhole.

If you want your bog garden to be lighter in weight, fill the bowl around halfway with perlite. On top of this you will add your soil. The soil for most bog gardens should be 1/2 sphagnum peat moss combined with 1/2 horticultural sand. Mix this well with plenty of purified water until it is like soft mud. Then add it to your container.

Perlite has an unsightly habit of coming to the surface of the soil when you're digging around adding your plants, so I personally like the more natural-looking peat and sand combination for the whole bog. You could use long-fibered sphagnum moss for the soil, but it sinks and decomposes more than peat and not all plants enjoy long-fibered moss, such as venus flytraps.

Planting the Bog: If you are going to put in bare-rooted plants, then it is best to set up your bog toward the end of winter dormancy or early spring. However, a bog can be set up anytime of the year if you use potted plants. Remove the whole lump of soil from the pot, careful not to disturb the roots in any major way. You can set these into the garden bowl that is partially filled with soil so their soil surface is fairly even with the top rim of the container. Fill in the empty space between the root balls by spooning in your soft, wet peat and sand mix. Alternatively, you simply fill the bowl with soil and then dig out holes to place your plants into, but a very wet soil will sink and collapse every time you scoop some out.

Once your plants are in, firm the soil with your fingers or a spoon. The peat may quake like a bowl of jello. Don't worry, it will eventually settle down. Your newly planted bog may look sparse and messy at first. Again, don't fret: a good selection of plants will soon fill it out.

I like to add some club mosses or pine needles to the surface of a newly planted mini-bog, to give it a natural look more quickly, and to prevent spattering from heavy rains. Some mosses will grow on their own, adding nice, stable ground-cover. I avoid adding live sphagnum, which tends to overgrow smaller plants. but if you intend to grow only larger species such as *Sarracenia* in your bog, live sphagnum can look quite nice.

Once your island mini-bog is planted, you can set it into the larger, undrained container. Then add water into this moat. Water will enter through the sphagnum plug. and the water-level in the soil will match the depth in the outer bowl. Always use purified-quality water.

Most CP like a fluctuation in their water level. Typically you can fill the moat right to the top, even with the level of soil, then let the water level drop to near the bottom over a period of days. allowing oxygen to permeate the soil. You will also be able to see how long the water lasts before the bog dries out. For those long vacations, or

if you are lazy like me, an even larger water bowl would be helpful. On the other hand, rains keep the water level too high for too long a time, such as during winter dormancy. You may want to spill out excess water during these times, to allow the roots to "breathe". On average, maintain the water level about halfway deep, and never let the soil dry out.

Selecting the Plants: Choosing the variety of plants you wish to grow depends on where you will keep your minibog. Greenhouses will offer the widest selection if



Figure 1. Lionel Gazeau's mini-bogs, Sonoma County

you live in a cold winter climate. But a bog of temperate plants will not do well in the winter if placed in a hot house heated above sixty degrees year'round!

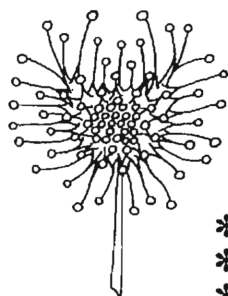
For the United States, if you live in USDA Hardiness Zones 7 through 10, you can grow a nice assortment of temperate plants outdoors all year. American pitcher plants, venus flytraps, and temperate sundews such as *D. rotundifolia*, *intermedia*, *anglica* and *filiformis*, plus terrestrial bladderworts like *U. cornuta* or *subulata* do well. (Zone 7 has an average minimum winter low temperate range of 0° to 10°. Zone 8 is 10° to 20° Zone 9 20° to 30°, Zone 10 is 30° to 40°) Warmer Zones such as 9 and 10 will offer additional varieties such as cape and forked sundews, most pygmy sundews, *Cephalotus*, temperate butterworts such as *P. caerulea*. If you live say, in Chicago, Zone 5, -20° to -10° you can still grow a mini-bog outdoors year 'round, but you should obtain plants native to such northerly climes, such as *S. purpurea* ssp. *purpurea*, the sundews from areas like the Great Lakes (*rotundifolia*, *anglica*) and perhaps the butterwort *P. vulgaris*. These plants are often hard to find through CP nurseries, but propagated plants can be found by advertising in this Newsletter, or grown from seed found through the seed bank.

Most people want a large variety of CP in their mini-bog, and a surprising large

amount of plants can fit in a small space. I live on the border of Zones 9 and 10, and the first bog of this type I did was in a 14" bowl. I planted *S. rubra* ssp. *wherryi* and a *S. flava* in the center. Around the edge I added *S. psittacina*, *D. capensis*, *capillaris*, *filiformis* v. *tracyi*, and the pygmy *D. nitidula* x *occidentalis*. I also added a couple of flytraps and *U. livida* for some color. To make it more natural, I also put in a small clump of decorative bunch grass, and two pieces of granite rock. Other bog plants, orchids like the *Disas* which grow in South Africa with cape sundews, can look nice in the bog, and incredible when in flower. Don't add limestone rocks or sea shells, which are too limey for an acid bog.

Now, six years later, the bog still sits on my deck. All the plants have done well, except the flytraps (which don't like the often waterlogged conditions as much as the other plants). The *S. rubra* has about 50 pitchers on it, the *D. filiformis* has grown to a clump of 5, the pygmies and *D. capillaris* have even survived the onslaught of capes and grass. You can't even see the granite rocks anymore! This winter I plan to disassemble

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