

Drosophila melanogaster vs. *Nepenthes x Coccinea*

or

"My Pitcher Plant Can Knockout Your Fruit Fly"

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What's tiny (3mm long), can slip through the tiniest opening in your window screens, relishes ripe fruit, has beady little red eyes, and is the scourge of parrots and their keepers everywhere?

Meet *Drosophila melanogaster*, affectionately known as the Fruit Fly. Native to most parts of the United States, Fruit Flies seemingly appear out of nowhere (I know, I know, Science has long since disproved the theory of Spontaneous Generation but sometimes I still wonder). With very prolific reproduction habits (a female can lay about 500 eggs in one sitting which hatch into adorable eensy little larva, or "maggots" in around 30 hours), a life cycle that lasts about a week, and super charged "manuverus-quickus-out-of-wayus" detection and relocation devices, you may have pulled most of your hair out in frustration before you've managed to swat down even one, let alone gotten rid of the entire invasion.

How can you control a pest so tiny and fiendish that it has been known to exist on drain sludge, dirty kitchen sponges, and even alcohol vapors? How can you hope to catch these villains who so cruelly and disrespectfully tread and salivate all over our parrot's carefully prepared meals just moments after they've been presented? "Chemicals," you say? "Sticky traps, expensive ultrasonic pest repellers, and unsightly baited contraptions," you cry?

Allow me to introduce our fearless green contender in the other corner of the ring..

Sitting quietly, albeit somewhat

strange looking and unusual, yet beautiful in its own right – I present the *Nepenthes* family of Carnivorous Plants.

Also known as Pitcher Plants and "Monkey Cups" (Because Monkeys have been seen sipping from the Pitchers at monkey soirees), *Nepenthes* come in many varieties. In this case, the

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Nepenthes has been crossed with *Coccinea* to form a hybrid. *Nepenthes* species vary in size, color (*Coccinea* have bright red cups when exposed to sunlight), shape, and ease of care. All *Nepenthes* like moist, easily drained substrate medium, humidity, dappled or diffused sunlight, warmer temperatures, and best of all – Fruit Flies.

I have a *vosmaeri* Eclectus Parrot, and where there will be Eclectus there will be fruit (or so it has been decreed), and where there will be fruit there will be

fruit flies. Sticky fly traps are unwelcome in my home; not only do they pose a danger to flighted birds but also to groggy roommates and boyfriends. Chemicals of any kind are contraband in our home, as are gross pickle jars with vinegar and rotting banana floating in them like some third grader's Science experiment gone terribly wrong (and left out on the counter as an invitation for dinner guests to inquire – "Oh that, well we have this fly problem ... would you like more pasta?" No thank you!). Expensive ultrasonic sound wave emitters are also out of the question as there is a seven-year old female Tarantula in our apartment who might not appreciate that type of intrusive cacophony.

Feeling beaten and taken advantage of by the troop of *Drosophila* whirring King Kongesque-like tiny helicopters around one very irritated *Edectus*, I found myself trying to find solace at the Plant Warehouse on Pine Street in San Francisco, California.

New plants always make me feel better when I'm facing defeat by 3mm long adversaries. That's when my eyes beheld two unusual green plants with funny little pitchers dangling from the ends of their flat broad leaves. I inquired and was told that they were *Nepenthes*, "Pitcher Plants," a variety of carnivorous plants, like the Venus Fly Trap or the Sundew, yet nothing like I had seen before.

I explained my predicament with the Fruit Fly regime I was currently living under. These plants were small, but if placed in prime locations might just help to bring the fly population down a little. I was told how to care for my two new comrades; diffused light, keep the



Pitcher Plant delivers a hard uppercut followed by a left hook and a devastating right, – Fruit Fly is hurt , he's on the ropes. Folks, I believe this fight is OVER.

substrate moist. I was wary and I wondered if I might have a rap sheet due to countless Venus Fly Trap deaths I was responsible for when I was a child.

Two weeks went by before it occurred to me to peek inside one of the tiny pitchers. Could my eyes deceive me? I counted four fruit flies in the depths of one pitcher, then six in the next! Every Pitcher I peeped into was a watery grave to a number of limp armed little fruit fly bodies. I was overjoyed. If only the plants were larger!

That afternoon found me back at the plant store looking to feed my Orchid addiction.

One of the guys behind the counter saw me walk in and gestured towards a large plants hanging a few feet away from him. I looked up and stopped cold. Was I dreaming? Could I really be seeing this huge granddaddy version of the two small *Nepenthes* I had tucked away at home?

“Twenty-nine bucks” he said. “I’ll take it!” I shouted. “*Nepenthes Coccinea*” read the tag. Wow.

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I realized when I got home that the mighty pitchers of my new gargantuan friend were empty. I called the plant store and was told to fill them one quarter of the way up with water (I used distilled) so that the festivities could begin.

Over the past few months I’m glad to say that with the addition of another large *Nepenthes Coccinea* and my original two, the battle over who has rights to my *Eclectus*’s food dishes is being won by me – or rather, by my *Nepenthes* family.

I’m looking into adding a few more CPs (Carnivorous Plants) to my collection. I want to try a few other varieties – each species seems more bizarre and curious than the next. Their care is relatively simple. I don’t let the substrate dry out between waterings. I keep direct sunlight to a minimum. I check the pitchers weekly, especially the new ones on the larger plants, to see if they need assistance “filling up.” Although San Francisco is not excessively humid, it’s certainly not dry air either. This helps keep *Nepenthes* happy and I am told there are species which are more forgiving than others when it comes to their requirements. If you’re interested in trying an attractive, unusual, natural way to

control pests like the irritating *Drosophila* I suggest checking out sites on the web like CP jungle’s informative website, especially:

http://wwwcpjungle.com/nepenthe_suniversity.htm

Another great site is the aptly named:

Pitcherplant.com.

Check this link for specific *Nepenthes* care:

http://www.pitcherplant.com/care_sheets/nepenthescare.html

There is so much information out there, and so many varieties of *Nepenthes* that you’re sure to find one that suits your ability and aesthetic.

On a final note, although *Nepenthes* are listed as non-toxic and safe for people and pets I would strongly advise keeping the plants out of reach. I am sure a curious parrot would like nothing more than to get hold of one of the large pitchers from one of the larger species of *Nepenthes* just to make sure nobody accidentally left any snacks inside. ❖