

Simplistic CP Fertilization Facts

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It is a well known fact that mature carnivores are quite adapt at capturing sufficient prey in the wilds to meet their nutritional requirements. But what of life in a controlled greenhouse where insects are discouraged and even eliminated by other means? Most endearing collectors have resorted to using manmade fertilizers periodically to stimulate their plants. The only question that remains is how much, how often, what kind, and how to apply the fertilizer. Over the years, I have grown countless thousands of different carnivores and have developed the following thoughts on the matter. I provide them to you as a starting point and not as an end or absolute rule to follow. It has been my policy to experiment, and I encourage you to do the same when surplus plants are available and considered expendable.

I have found that all of the commercially available houseplant fertilizers that I have used are acceptable to CP in diluted application rates. I personally use the "K-Mart" brands which are similar to the "Miracle Gro" series because they are readily available on sale a couple of times a year. A two-pound box lasts me over a year (at constant use) with a large quantity of plants. The smallest available box should last the hobbist for a number of years. I alternate between the acid type (30-10-10) and the standard type (15-30-15) indiscriminately.

The most stringent policy that I try to adhere to is a consistent application program of twice-a-week for both seedlings and mature plants. I prefer to feed at highly diluted rates, 1/10 to 1/20th full-strength, on a nearly continual basis to promote plant growth, rather than a full-blown feed once a month. This constant low-level nourishment

forces growth continually, which is preferred for commercial production when time-grown programs have to be met. All feeding programs are discontinued when plants are in a dormant state.

The application device that I use is a "fogger" type sprayer. It puts out a heavy mist that totally surrounds the plants with the fertilizer solution. I am able to get nearly 100% coverage of foliar material, even with plants growing in dense proximity. Electrically operated foggers are expensive, and for many years I used a hand operated sprayer (both canister and finger-pump types) with similar success. Collectors can use a finger-pump type but must be careful to avoid over-watering your plants. You want to mist them, not swamp them. *Drosera* are the best guide as to application rates. The more active *Drosera* (*D. capensis*, *D. hamiltonii* and *D. rotundifolia*) will really curl and fold up with excessive or near full-strength fertilizer. Experimentation with your sprayer and type of fertilizer-to-water ratio will determine the proper level for you to use. Ideally, *Drosera* tentacles will just bend in slightly, an hour or two after being fertilized. You can direct your sprays into *Sarracenia*, *Nepenthes*, *Cephalotus* and *Darlingtonia* pitchers if you desire. I always had too many plants to be selective and relied on the fogger to cover all areas. The important fact is to direct the spray to the plants, not to the medium. This is wasteful of fertilizer, and excessive use could eventually alter the medium's composition in closed unit terrariums.

You have been given "just the facts" to get you started in developing a synthetic CP fertilizing program. The fun starts with the results.