



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

California Pitcher Plant (*Darlingtonia californica*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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California Pitcher Plants (Darlingtonia Californica)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/california-pitcher-plants-darlingtonia-californica/

By colliex2

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I remember the first time I saw a carnivorous California Pitcher Plant (at the Darlingtonia Wayside near Florence). The grove of odd-shaped plants looked like something from outer space.



Darlingtonia californica (Oregon State Parks)

Looking at this tall (up to about 40-inches), upright, tube-shaped plant, one might think it **was** alien. Researcher Dr. Dawn Cardace has been investigating ancient subduction areas of the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains. She is looking for potential applications for life on other planets (see <https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/beauty/serpentine/conservation/microbes.shtml>).

A link to the unknown is easy to imagine when a bug flies in and never comes out.

Plants that grow in bogs have adapted different survival strategies and the California Pitcher Plant (*Darlingtonia Californica*) is no exception. For starters, the plant is fairly rare and grows in wetland areas where the pH is around 8 (most of our Pacific Northwest soils are on the acid side closer to 4-5). This pH level is common around serpentine soils.

The seeps of cold, running water helps moderate the plant's root temperature. The roots are very sensitive to temperature changes, more so than the leaves.

Even so, it is the roots that give the plant the ability to quickly resprout even after a major fire. This ability has not gone unnoticed or researched. For more information see “Vegetation Recovery in the Biscuit Fire, Siskiyou National Forest, Oregon” at <https://www.frames.gov/catalog/41316>. The 2002 Biscuit Fire burned nearly 500,000 acres and is considered to be the largest fire in Oregon in the past century.

Trapped Inside

Most North American pitcher plants have slippery walls and downward-pointing hairs in their tubular leaves that help prevent prey from escaping. The *Darlingtonia californica* has an ingenious tiny, hidden exit and multiple translucent false exits making it even better at capturing and retaining its prey. The cells inside the tube can absorb nutrients like roots do which helps supplement the plant’s nitrogen requirements.



Foreground is a wild orchid (*Cypripedium californicum*) with grove of *Darlingtonia* in background (royalty free image Unsplash Moore)

But there is more to this story. A few fun facts about carnivorous plants:

- They grow predominantly in wetlands on every continent except for Antarctica.
- The U.S. has the largest variety of the over 700 species.
- Many wild carnivorous plants have gone extinct since the arrivals of Europeans. It is

estimated that only five percent of the wild carnivorous plants remain.

—Charles Darwin, one of the first carnivorous plant enthusiasts, spent 20 years researching and writing his book “Insectivorous Plants.”

See to believe

There are several locations where you can see the California Pitcher Plant including the:

—**Darlingtonia Preserve** located just off Highway 101, north of Florence, Oregon. This 18-acre preserve/State Park is centered on a peat bog. It is the only Oregon State Park dedicated to the protection of a single plant species

(https://oregonstateparks.org/index.cfm?do=parkPage.dsp_parkPage&parkId=81)

—**Darlingtonia Trail**, Smith River National Recreation Area (north and east of Crescent City near the Oregon/California border) see <https://www.pickatrail.com/trails/national-recreation-areas/smith-river/darlingtonia-trail.html>

—**Eight Dollar Mountain Botanical Area**, Wild and Scenic Illinois River Corridor managed by the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Eight Dollar Mountain is one of the most significant botanical sites in Oregon. Many large *Darlingtonia* swamps exist at the base of the conical-shaped mountain. See

https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/regions/Pacific_Northwest/EightDollar/index.shtml