Plant of the Month: May

**Scientific Name:** *Sarracenia flava*

**Common Name:** Yellow Pitcher Plant

**Selected by:** Horticulturist Robert Davidson

Each year as April turns to May, I am always thrilled to watch our native pitcher plants (*Sarracenia* sp.) come to life. Pitcher plants are carnivorous plants that receive nutrients from insects that they capture and decompose within their hollow tubes. With a slippery lip housing a nectar containing a toxin known as Coniine, these pitcher plants poison and then trap their prey in a pit of downward facing hairs. Once inside, it is nearly impossible for a victim to escape. *Sarracenia* are typically found in low lying bogs that are poor in soil nutrients. Surviving in such poor soil can be difficult, so these carnivorous plants have evolved to find their nutrients elsewhere. Carolina bays and pocosins are the native hot spots for these unique plants.

*Sarracenia flava* is one of our 11 native pitcher plant species and usually the first to show signs of new activity each spring. Commonly known as yellow pitcher plant, for its yellow flower, *Sarracenia flava* can be found spanning the coastal plain of the southeastern United States from Virginia south to Florida and west into Alabama. *S. flava* tends to be one of the taller *Sarracenia* species reaching heights of around 3 feet. Although *S. flava* are typically a bright green color, some can appear red or copper. My favorite variety of *S. flava* is known by the cultivar ‘Copper Top’ and is shown in the photo above.

*S. flava* can be finicky and difficult to place within a garden’s landscape, but once established it is an exciting and unique addition for any home owner. These plants like to be kept saturated at all times in a 3:1 mix of peat to sand. Each February, *S. flava* should be cut back to the ground. In nature these plants are typically found in part shade, but their best and brightest colors are brought out in full sun. Artificial bogs can be made fairly easy with liners or containers. It is important to remember that if one is building their own bog they do not collect their plants from the wild, but to make sure they purchase their *Sarracenia* from a reputable source. Do not disturb these rare and unique species in the wild because their range has been dramatically reduced in the last century due to fire suppression.

*Sarracenia flava* in bloom

Photos taken by Robert Davidson