



Growing *Cephalotus follicularis* in Singapore

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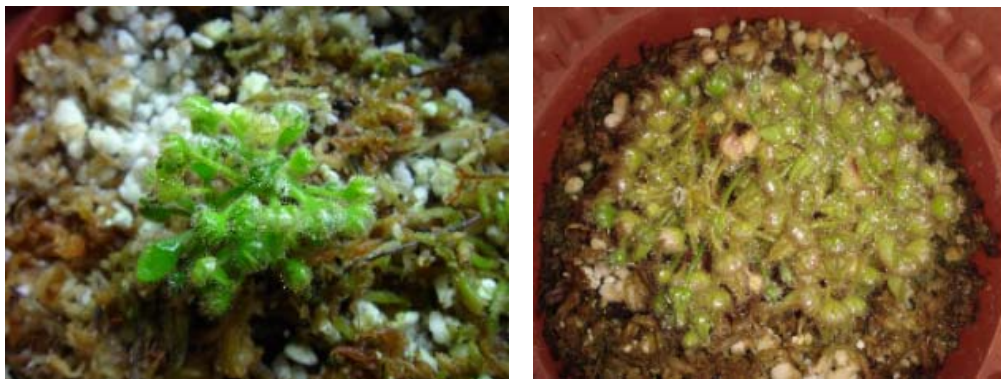
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Cephalotus follicularis is known as the Albany Pitcher Plant or West Australian Pitcher Plant. This distinctive species has a reputation of being difficult to grow but once the plants establish themselves, the effort is absolutely worthwhile.

This species is not readily available for purchase even from overseas nurseries. If available, they are mostly costly. To top that, the species does not ship well and many newly purchased plants die soon after, especially if their needs are not well taken care of.

In March 2006, I had the opportunity to purchase two pots of tissue-cultured *Cephalotus*. It was already hardened in the nursery greenhouse for about 6 months. This was the beginning of my *Cephalotus* journey (or madness as some of my carnivorous plants (CP) friends would call it).



Left: Photo of the hardened plant, newly potted up.

Right: Photo of the same plant in September 2007.



Above: Fresh TC plants covered with a clear plastic cup to keep the humidity high.



Above: Close-up of the plants inside the set-up.

The plant shown on the previous page is grown at my apartment's balcony, which faces north, slightly to the west. It is sheltered from the rain but receives direct sunlight for some part of the day. The medium used consists of long fibre sphagnum (LFS) and perlite. Watering is only carried out when the LFS on the surface is dry as the growing medium needs to be kept moist but not wet.

Other than the hardened tissue cultured (TC) plants, I also had the chance to handle fresh TC material from a kind donor. The potted plants are covered with a cup to keep the humidity high. The hole on the top is for ventilation.

Until today, the plants are still in the same set-up. The reason is simple: do not fix what is not broken. If the plant is doing well for you, leave it alone to grow as it pleases. Well, at least that is a rule for *Cephalotus*.

So is that the end of my madness? Nah...I recently acquired some mature plants (2 to 4 years old), which are cuttings (pictures shown below). They were from a dear friend who lives in Western Australia. He has been growing *Cephalotus* for two decades.



Above: These mature *Cephalotus* plants are potted in assorted media (peat/perlite, peat/sand, peat/washed leca etc). The proportion starts from 25% to 50% peat.

Hurray!!! Should we all rush and start ordering the *Cephalotus*? First, take a look at the photos below.



Left: This is amount of pitchers you may lose from the shipping. Some of the leaves have turned yellow too.

Right: Next, if you use the wrong potting mix, which in my case was unwashed leca pebbles...That is what you will get.

So why am I still so obsessed with growing this plant? There is a sense of achievement when the pitchers start to colour up under my care!



Left: Newly potted up *Cephalotus* plant.

Right: The same plant, 18 days later.

And of course, I do hope one day they will grow up to this size...



Left: Look at the size of the pitcher of this *Cephalotus* plant!

Some FAQs Answered...

Are newly deflasked TC plants easy to grow?

TC plants, which are newly removed from the agar, need to be kept an environment with high humidity. Even so, air ventilation is important and I found the set-up recommended by tropica (Mr Lin) very useful. The plant is potted up and covered with a cup. A hole would have to be made on the bottom of the cup to aid ventilation. Surrounding the TC *Cephalotus* with live sphagnum moss also helps. The plants are watered once a week by misting.



Left: TC *Cephalotus* sitting amongst live sphagnum moss.

TC plants can eventually be hardened to lower humidity by slowly increasing the size of the hole on the cup or via the use of a Ziploc bag. This process takes about 2 to 3 weeks. If you have live sphagnum moss in the pot, they will dry up by that time so do remove them if you intend to keep them.

How can *Cephalotus* be best acclimatized to my growing conditions?

Most nurseries keep their plants in very high humidity to maintain the pitchers for a long period of time. A new plant needs to be kept in high humidity after potting, in a Ziploc bag. The bag can be opened little by little over 2 to 3 weeks.

Another tip which I picked up from Matt K. (quogue) is to “air harden” the roots. Just place the bareroot plant in a slightly opened Ziploc bag with a piece of moist tissue paper over a week before potting.

Can tap water be used on *Cephalotus*? And how often should I water the plant?

Singapore's tap water is alright to use on this species. As with the frequency of watering, there are two schools of thought. Some growers water their *Cephalotus* overhead on a daily basis since in the wild *Cephalotus* have running water at their roots. Others prefer to water only 1 to 2 times a week, keeping the medium just moist and not wet.

It depends largely on the medium that is used. The looser the mix i.e. higher percentage of perlite or sand, the more often you can water the plants.

What are some useful websites on the cultivation of *Cephalotus*?

- <http://www.aqph26.dsl.pipex.com/cephalotusfollik.html>
- <http://www.carnivorousplants.org/seedbank/species/Cephalotus.htm>

Where can *Cephalotus* be bought from?

Cephalotus is not sold in our local nurseries and is currently available only from online nurseries. Triffid Park, Southern Carnivores and the Ebay are sources for the species.

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