

OBSERVATIONS ON SARRACENIA OREOPHILA

by Don Schnell

This species is certainly not the best studied of the Sarracenias. It is commonly held that its range is a rather narrow area in Northeast Alabama. Randy Troup of Guntersville, Alabama, spent many years carefully tracing down all reported stations in an attempt to authenticate the range. He found that the species was rather common in its area, and that the range actually extends south of Birmingham. I had an opportunity to visit several stations with Randy and have since revisited these and some others. As is the case with *S. flava*, one is struck by the variation present within the species, but doubly so since the plant was felt to be rare and rather monotypic for so many years. In spite of the variation, species characteristics were clear and uniformly present, particularly the flower, shape of the hood and character of the winter leaves.

There would appear to be two rather common variant patterns. One is typified by the plants that grow along the Little River just over the line from George, on the Sand Mountain plateau. These plants grow right on the edge of the water, the soil being extremely sandy and rocky. At first glance they appear to be etiolated, with rather pale green pitchers that are tall and lanky, little or no vein coloration and narrow mouths. The other type is best seen in an open field which is dishlike in contour with a natural pond in its center, and is located about fifteen miles further west. Here, the plants do not grow "with their feet in the water" but occur in a ring around the pond in definitely wet peat-sand soil some fifteen to twenty feet from the edge of the water, but well below the highest elevation of the field where the trees begin and the soil is drier. These plants are rather stout, the pitchers often having deeply colored veins, coppery colored lids and wider mouths.

Plants were collected from both stations and grown under identical conditions (including washing of roots and replanting in the same formulated soil). One would expect that the changes noted above could very well be environmental, but the variant characters held true, the river plants maintaining their rather lanky, pale habitus and the field-collected ones their more hardy appearance for at least two subsequent seasons.

S. oreophila is a problem in culture, the plants tending to wane and pine away in time, under conditions where other transplanted Sarracenias thrive. My impression is that they do better if collected with a good ball of sod around them, the entire mass being put into a tub with the roots relatively undisturbed. But even then their lifespan in culture seems limited. Much more needs to be learned of the factors possibly present in native soils and/or waters that are necessary for the health of this plant and that probably need renewing.



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