

A Plant That Eats Insects

Most plants make their own food in their leaves. To make food, they use light, air, water, and **nutrients** found in soil. If the soil does not contain enough nutrients, the plant cannot survive.

The Venus flytrap is a very interesting plant. It grows in soil that does not contain enough nutrients to help it survive. So how does a Venus flytrap get the nutrients it needs? It eats insects!

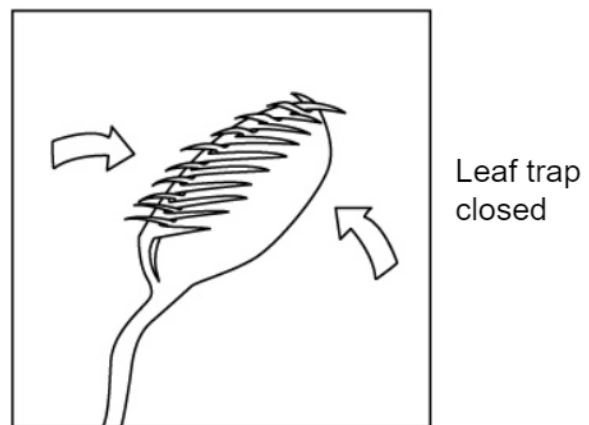
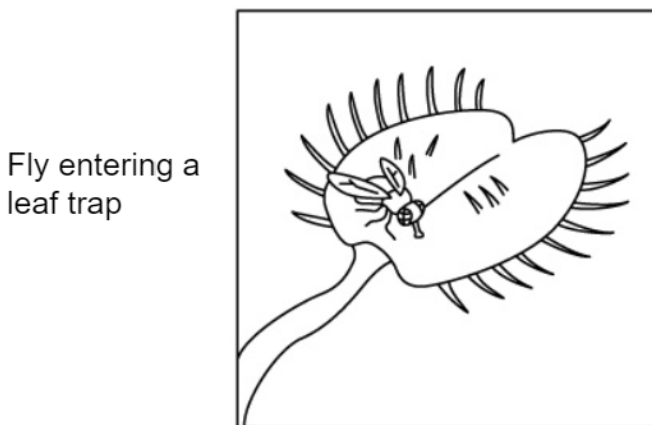
Be Careful—It Is a Trap!

The Venus flytrap has special leaves that are perfect for catching insects. Inside each leaf are **trigger hairs**. When an insect such as a fly lands inside a leaf, the insect touches the trigger hairs. The trigger hairs send a signal to the plant to quickly close the leaf trap.

It takes a lot of energy for the Venus flytrap to close a leaf trap. The plant does not want to waste energy by trapping tiny insects. It wants a nice, big meal! The leaf traps will not close unless the insect is big enough to contain lots of nutrients.

When the leaf trap closes, it crushes the insect and kills it. The trap stays closed for one to two weeks while the plant absorbs the nutrients in the insect. Then the trap opens again, ready to catch another insect. Each leaf trap can only catch an insect three or four times. After that, the trap will no longer work.

After eating an insect, the Venus flytrap is not in a hurry for its next meal. The Venus flytrap can go without a meal for one to two months, but will eat about once a week if it can.





“A Plant That Eats Insects”—Think About It

1. Why can a Venus flytrap grow in soil that other plants could not grow in?

2. How does a Venus flytrap save energy?

3. Why does a Venus flytrap need to have many leaf traps, and not just one?

4. Why do you think humans need to eat much more often than Venus flytraps? (Hint: Think about size and energy.)

5. What surprised you about Venus flytraps?

Answers

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1. A Venus flytrap gets nutrients from insects, so it can grow in soil that does not contain the nutrients most plants need.
2. A Venus flytrap saves energy by not closing a leaf trap when the insect inside it is too small to contain lots of nutrients.
3. A Venus flytrap needs to have many leaf traps because each one will stop closing once it has caught an insect three or four times.
4. Humans are much larger than Venus flytraps and they are moving all the time, so they need lots of energy from food. Venus flytraps are smaller than humans and they move much less (closing and opening leaf traps), so they do not need to eat as often as humans.
5. Answers will vary. Sample answers: I was surprised to find out that the leaves can only close 3 or 4 times, and that one meal can last the plant for up to 2 months.