



Darlingtonia californica (Cobra Lily)



Darlingtonia californica has mostly-upright tubular leaves with a cobra-like hood complete with fang-like appendages. It is closely related to the Sarracenias, with a lobster-pot style trap that most resembles that of *Sarracenia psittacina*.

The leaves exude a sweet scent to attract insects to the plant. The nectar on the “fangs” lead the insects to a small opening into which they may have to force entry. The translucent window-like effect in the plant’s hood confuses the insects into making futile attempts at escape which ultimately ends in exhaustion, drowning and digestion.

Distribution and habitat

Darlingtonia californica is native to the north-western U.S.A., its range being the coastal areas and mountain slopes of Oregon and extending south-eastwards into the mountains of North California. It grows in bogs of Sphagnum moss and in peat soils and gravel near cool springs and streams. The plants seem to prefer (if not require) to have their roots kept cool at all times.

Light

It is preferable to grow your Cobra Lily outside in a cool spot in bright light, with light shade to filtered sun. Avoid hot masonry walls or hot courtyards. If grown indoors, put your plant in a brightly lit place but not too close to a window where the sun can shine onto the pots. It is normal for old leaves to brown off and die as new ones grow to replace them.

Temperature

In its native environment *Darlingtonia* can face fairly high temperatures but also sits in seeps from mountain streams.

Some growers have noted that when their plants’ roots are exposed to temperatures higher than about 10°C they will fail. Other growers have had better success at higher temperatures without taking any special precautions. Yet others have hypothesized that the plants are actually being killed by fungal root rot and not root temperature.

Darlingtonia is frost-tolerant.

Water

Use rainwater where possible. If tap water has low or neutral pH it can be used, but ensure that the watering is done from above. Flush the tray out completely every two weeks or so, to ensure that dissolved salts/minerals/contaminants are removed.

Fertilizer

Do not feed. It is not needed, and will raise the nutrients in the pot to a toxic level and may kill your plant.

Growing media

Grow your Cobra Lily in a squat plastic pot (15 cm / 6" minimum). Avoid black plastic pots as any sunlight that shines on them will quickly heat them up with fatal results.

Use 1 part live Sphagnum moss to 1 part Perlite (available at most Garden Centre / nurseries).

The dried Sphagnum moss available at most retailers will usually start to grow if kept moist and in bright light. Pre-soak the moss 24 hours before use to ensure that it is thoroughly wet and at the right pH.

The moss will provide a cool root run for your plant and will give you a visual indication that the conditions are right – if the conditions are good for the moss it will be good for the plant.

To increase the humidity around your plant and to provide the right soil moisture, sit the pot in a wide saucer or tray (again avoid black) containing at least 25mm (1") of water during the spring, summer and autumn. Reduce this level in winter but do not allow the potting media to dry out at any time.

Dormancy

Darlingtonia goes dormant in winter. Plants originating from coastal areas generally require less of a dormancy period.

Propagation

1. Seed.
2. Stolon cuttings.

Common pests and diseases

1. Fungal disease.

Remove dead leaves to prevent fungus growth. If using fungicide, do not use copper-based preparations.

When to replot

When the plant appears to be outgrowing its pot, or when the potting media appears to be deteriorating.

Credits:

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