

## Plants that eat meat!

OK. We eat plants to be healthy, but some plants eat baby mice, small frogs, insects and other tiny creatures for their nutrients. They are called carnivorous plants.

At the BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair in May 2024, our star cheese plant, Ellen Bella Cheese, met some gorgeous carnivorous plants from Hants Fly Trap. You can check out their gorgeous plants here: <https://www.hantsflytrap.com/>

These plants have evolved to be plenty smart. They often emit sweet smells to attract unsuspecting insects, and when their prey is within grasp, these plants (like the Venus fly trap) would snap shut their jaws! Let's call the Venus fly trap Martin.

The science behind this: inside Martin's mouth, are tiny hairs, and when insects crawl inside the mouth, it triggers the jaws to clamp down, trapping the insect that then gets dissolved by Martin's digestive juices, pretty much in the same way your stomach acids digest plants! Eating insects give Peter the amino acids and ammonium ions he needs to grow big, strong and nasty!

But hang on, why is Martin choosing to eat meat unlike his other plant relatives? That's because his ancestors have evolved to inhabit areas with boggy, nutrient-poor soils — areas where plants that draw nutrients from the soil via their roots can't survive.

But Martin the Venus fly trap is not the only type of carnivorous plant. We have Serena, a type of carnivorous plant called Sarracena. Unlike Venus fly traps, they don't have moving parts and they trap insects by luring them close with their scents, and then the insects slip in, and fall deep, deep, deep into a pool of liquid containing digestive enzymes and wetting agents quickly drowns their prey and begins digestion. Pretty and scary (for insects) at the same time!

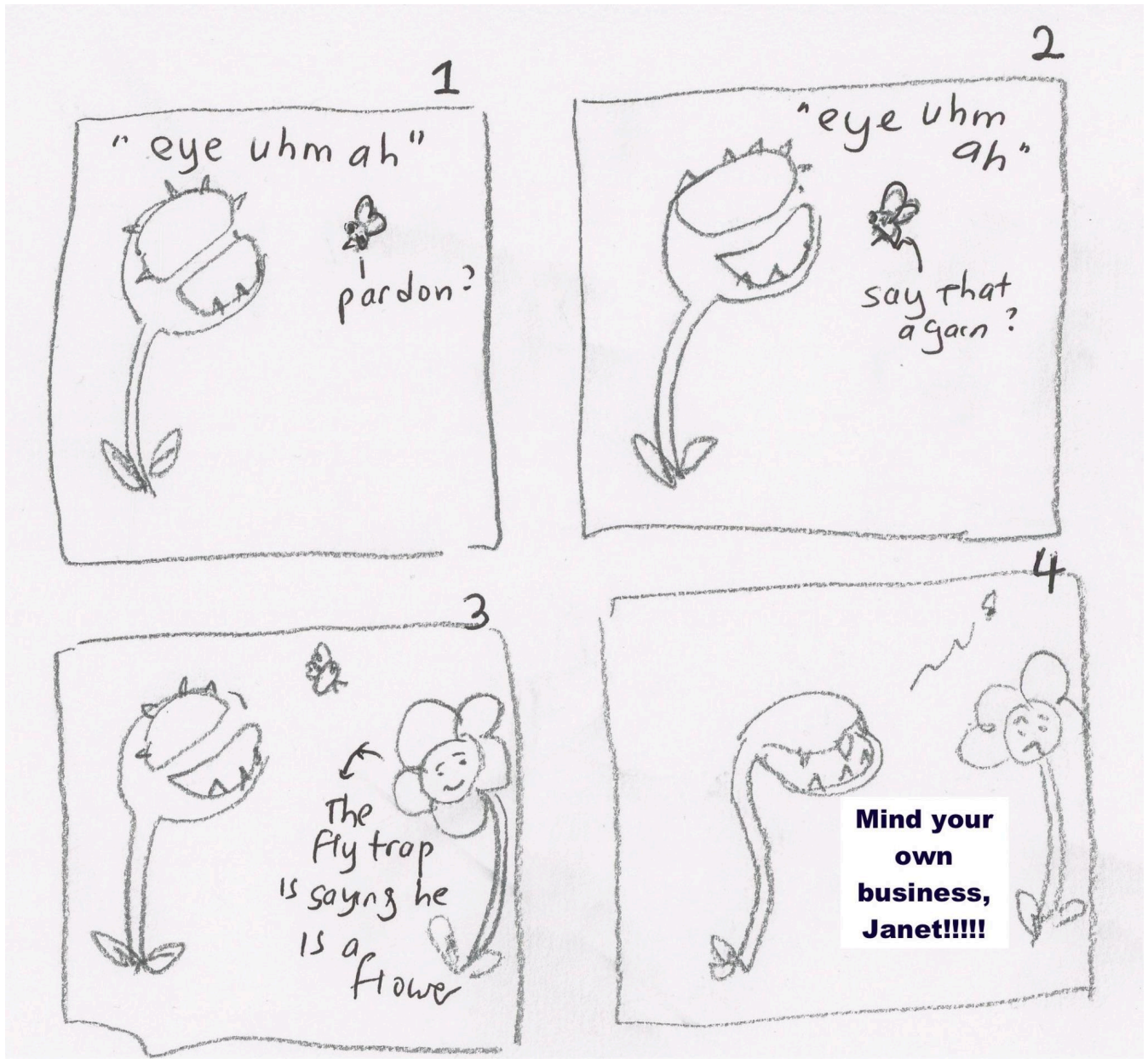
## How to look after your carnivorous plants:

1. Light - they need at least six hours of direct sun indoors, such as a south-facing window or under bright grow lights; a greenhouse is ideal. Be careful when putting them outdoors, as direct sunlight is harmful to them.
2. Water - make sure that they have water all the time! Never let their soil dry out! But they don't like tap water, because tap water has a lot of minerals. They prefer rainwater or distilled water. Sit pots in a tray filled with about ½" of water and let them soak up the water. Don't water from above!
3. Soil - Make sure you grow them on the right soil. Do NOT use compost, garden soil, or regular potting soil. They should come in the right soil when you buy them.
4. Fertilisers - they don't need any! They eat insects. If there are not many insects in your house, you can feed them freeze-dried mealworms, bloodworms, and crickets are good choices – but no more than one insect per week!

Finally, love your Peters and Serenas. Take them outdoors on sunny days (but in the shade) so that they can catch their own food, as Nature intended.

For more fun stuff, check out [www.worldgardenschools.org](http://www.worldgardenschools.org)





**Fun and silly stuff to do:**

**Say "I am a flower" without closing your mouth, like Martin.**

(Look how happy he was in pictures 1, 2 and 3, pretending to be a flower with that big smile.)