

Dionaea muscipula

VENUS' FLY-TRAP is an evergreen, insectivorous perennial. Native to south-eastern North America (specifically North and South Carolinas), it has white flowers.

It is also known as *Mucholapka podivná* (Czech), Tippitiwitchet, *Venusfliegenfalle* (German), and Venus' mouse-trap; and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of duplicity.

If one or two of the three 'trigger' hairs on the leaves are touched, the jaw-like leaf segments close. Bristle-toothed edges interlock trapping the insect/visitor (including spiders – and even small frogs) which is squashed and then digested by glandular secretions.

Indigestible remains dry, then the blades re-open and the dried remains are blown away by the wind. Authorities note that flowering may be stimulated by the trapping activity and that the leaves wither after they have caught three separate insects. (The flowers wither and blacken after about 5 days.)

Venus' fly-trap is considered to be an endangered species and is protected under American State laws. In addition in 1998 the World Conservation Monitoring Centre issued the first global list (referred to colloquially as the 'Red List') of threatened plants. The combination of fire, drainage and development has led to its inclusion on the List as it is now thought to be rare.

Muscipula is derived from Latin *musca* (fly) meaning 'fly-catcher or fly-catching'.

The common name Venus' fly-trap continues the genus reference to the classical goddess of love but adopts her Roman name.

Records note that North American Cherokee fisherman chewed a small piece of the plant then spat it onto their bait.

It is understood that the then Governor of North Carolina, Arthur Dobbs (1689-1765), discovered Venus' fly-trap in 1760. Although other botanists are known to have come across the plant, the credit for introducing it to Britain seems generally to be laid at the feet of a nurseryman and plant collector, William Young. Apparently, as recognition of his appointment as botanist to Queen Charlotte (1744-1818) who was married to George III, Mr. Young managed to transport a live specimen of this plant to London in 1768. (Some authorities note that one of the first known descriptions of this insectivorous perennial appeared in a letter written in 1769 to the famous Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus, by an Englishman, John Ellis (1711-1776) – but little credence was given to it then as the existence of carnivorous plants was still generally held to be far-fetched.)