

VIA

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SEBASTOPOL'S LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE INSECTS WHO ENTER HERE! declares a sign at the entrance to California Carnivores, the world's only walk-in insectivorous plant nursery and the largest collection of bug-eating plants on earth. Set in Sebastopol, Calif., amid the vineyards of Sonoma County, this 8,000-square-foot greenhouse holds a jungle of yawning flytraps, seductive sundews, bewitching nepenthes, and hundreds of other species of voracious vegetation.

Carnivorous plants evolved in habitats of mineral-deficient soil, like swamps and bogs, where flora are forced to seek nutrition using something other than their roots. They capture insects with sticky leaves, specialized pitchers (jug shaped), or snapping jaws; enzymes dissolve the bugs so the nutrients soak into the plant.

Sustaining themselves on a diet of the creepy and crawly, these specimens dwell on the fringe of botany, near the border of the animal kingdom. Are they from far-off, exotic lands? "In truth, North America contains Earth's widest variety of flesh-eating plants," say co-owner Peter D'Amato. "They are bizarre, yes, but beautiful." Information: (707) 824-0433, www.california

carnivores.com.

— GEOFFREY COFFEY

