

CASCADE CARNIVORES

CARNIVOROUS PLANT NURSERY



Mexican Butterworts (Pinguicula)

Mexican Butterworts, the topic of this care sheet, do not vary that much from one species to another in their individual requirements. They are tropical plants, and like warm temperatures, usually above 70 deg F. Most will adapt quite nicely to cooler conditions. They are good candidates for windowsill growing, as well as in terrariums and greenhouses. What follows is a quick guide to the general requirements of Mexican Pinguicula. It is not intended to be an in-depth guide for all species. For species-specific care please see one of the excellent resources on carnivorous plant care, such as *The Savage Garden* by Peter D'Amato, or *Growing Carnivorous Plants* by Dr. Barry A. Rice.

The dormancy issue. Mexican pings experience a seasonal change of growth due to climate. But unlike the overriding seasonal fluctuation of hot and cold, this one is wet and dry. Most Mexican pings will change to a smaller growth form, during this drier season, becoming a smaller, more compact plant, which is non-carnivorous. That is, it does not produce the sticky glue-like secretions on the leaf surface that it needs to catch insects. So for part of the year it survives the dry season by becoming a succulent. This is known as it's 'winter form'. This is not a true dormancy, as generally plants in winter form are still growing, although slower and in a compact size. Some plants will appear to die, even dropping below the soil surface, to come back 'from the dead' in the spring.

The 5 most important points for growing Mexican Butterworts:

1) Most Mexican Butterworts are not bog plants. They grow in natural seeps and similar habitats where they are kept constantly wet during the rainy season. They grow on the ground, on stream banks and cliff faces, and even on moss covered trees. They sometimes grow in moss, leaf debris or clinging precariously to wet rock faces or fissures. Use well draining mixes with horticultural sand, perlite and peat moss. Our mix is made of 1 part each of sand, perlite, vermiculite, pumice and peat moss.

2) During the period of active growth, water Mexican Butterworts by placing in a tray of pure water. Rain water, RO filtered or distilled are all good choices. As with any plants watered by the tray method, any impurities in the water are collected and concentrated in the water tray and in the soil over time. Be careful of water labeled 'drinking water', as this usually has minerals added for taste, and this can be harmful to your carnivorous plants.

During winter most Mexican pings will enter their winter form, when they must not be kept as wet. This is the time to take Mexican pings out of the water tray, or at least let the tray go dry before refilling. Some forms of Mexican pings will rot if left in waterlogged conditions when in their winter form. The best thing is to keep them only slightly moist, but otherwise in the same growing conditions of temperature and light that they receive the rest of the year. When you see them start to grow carnivorous leaves again, place them back in the water tray.

As an extreme example, *P. gypsicola* needs to be kept bone dry during this period. Take it out of the terrarium, if it's in one, and allow it to completely dry out. Keep it dry until you see new growth.

3) Mexican Pings like some sun, usually morning sun which is not too hot, especially if you have your pings in a terrarium. A couple of hours a day is plenty, and is only needed to produce the best coloration. Most pings will grow just fine with good strong indirect light all day. This is exactly the same as growing tropical sundews, which share common habitats with many Butterworts. They also do really well under artificial lighting, such as fluorescent.

4) You can feed pings, but that is not usually necessary as they will attract and eat a variety of small flying insects, like fruit flies and gnats. For forced feeding, try freeze-dried bloodworms, moistened first, available from tropical fish suppliers.

5) Never, ever feed any plant food or fertilizer to this or other carnivorous plants until you are an experienced grower, and know what you are doing and why, or you are following the instructions of an experienced grower. Fertilizers have the potential to do great harm to these plants. It may even kill them.

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