

Captivating Coastal Wayside

A trip to the south central Oregon coast, off highway 101, just a few miles north of Florence, on Mercer Lake Road, will land you at a most unusual small wayside park. This park is solely dedicated to one plant species, the carnivorous *Darlingtonia californica*, otherwise known as the California cobra lily. This very dramatic plant is a member of the pitcher plant family.

Darlingtonia californica looks like a cobra in that it has a green hood atop 10 to 20-inch hollow tubes that serve as the digestive tract for this plant. The plant is a lime green color, which eventually develops a mottled purple and red color. Purple and yellow flowers rise above the hooded stalks during bloom periods.

There is a hidden opening into the plant, which is surrounded by large, green moustache-like 'fangs' beneath the curved hood. Nectar on these 'fangs' attracts insects which then wander into the hood. Inside the hood, the insect becomes confused because of the appearance of several 'exits', and falls into the lower part of the tube. There are numerous downward pointing hairs inside the tube, which prevent the insect from climbing up. A small amount of water at the bottom of the stalk contains bacteria which eventually decomposes the insect. The decomposed body is turned into nitrogen which is absorbed by the plant.



The cobra lily is native to Oregon and northern California. Its only requirement is water, and seems to grow mainly in bogs and wet meadows. The plant is difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate out of the wild. It is not known what exactly pollinates the plant, as no known pollinators have ever been observed.

The Darlingtonia Wayside is a small park, but there are picnic tables, water and restrooms. A short trail leads to a boardwalk which takes you to the colonies of Darlingtonia. It is well worth the trip!

References

[Darlingtonia Wayside](#), Retrieved 9/24/2006

[The Carnivorous Plant FAQ](#), Retrieved 9/24/2006