

Species within the genus *Utricularia*, family Lentibulariaceae, are carnivorous, herbaceous aquatic plants commonly known as bladderworts. The common name refers to traps, or urn-like bladders borne on finely dissected leaves of the branches.

The trapping mechanism consists of a bladder, a hanging door, and four stiff bristles attached to the lower edge of the door. Tiny animals, particularly crustaceans brush against the bristles causing the door to spring open. Water then rushes into the bladder and carries the animal with it. Once the bladder is filled, the door snaps shut. The prey is then digested by enzymes secreted by the plant.

Bladderworts are perennial plants that are either aquatic free-floating plants without roots, or are terrestrial. Terrestrial in the sense that they are anchored to the substrate by underground creeping stems. *Utricularia inflata* and *U. radiata* are examples of species that are free-floating. These species have distinctive swollen branches that look like “floats” that radiate from a node of the flowering stem like spokes of a wheel. *Utricularia resupinata* and *U. juncea* are examples of species that are terrestrial. The lower portions of their stems are subterranean and form mats of branched slender rhizomes, usually in saturated sandy soils.

The flowers of bladderworts are either yellow or purple. The flowers are 2-lipped, the upper lip is erect and the lower lip is usually 3-lobed with a spur, or tube-like projection. Flowers are borne on a leafless stem, or scape and are one to several flowered. Fruit is a pod with several seeds.

Bladderworts can be identified when flowering without too much trouble, but they are often found only in their vegetative state. Usually as a mass of finely dissected leaf-like branches. With some effort and study, species can be named using only vegetative characters.

Twelve (12) species are known from Delaware and all occur primarily in the Coastal Plain physiographic province of the state.

All species of bladderworts in Delaware, with the exception of two (*U. macrorhiza* and *U. radiata*), are considered to be rare or uncommon by the Delaware Natural Heritage Program. One species, *U. cornuta*, is historical in the state (last collected in 1923 from Sussex Co.), and another, *U. minor*, is thought to be extirpated, or gone from the state (last collected in 1863 from New Castle Co.).

Bladderworts occur in a variety of habitat types in Delaware. Some types are unique or specialized, such as Atlantic white cedar swamps and bogs, interdunal swales, sea-level fens, and coastal plain seasonal ponds. Other types are not so unique, such as slow moving streams and rivers. Others are artificial in their origins, such as millponds and abandoned sandpits.

The genus *Utricularia* in Delaware:

<i>Utricularia cornuta</i>	horned bladderwort
<i>Utricularia geminiscapa</i>	hidden-fruited bladderwort
<i>Utricularia gibba</i> (<i>U. biflora</i>)	humped bladderwort

<i>Utricularia inflata</i>	large swollen bladderwort
<i>Utricularia juncea</i>	southern bladderwort
<i>Utricularia macrorhiza (U. vulgaris)</i>	greater bladderwort
<i>Utricularia minor</i>	lesser bladderwort
<i>Utricularia purpurea</i>	purple bladderwort
<i>Utricularia radiata</i>	small swollen bladderwort
<i>Utricularia resupinata</i>	northeastern bladderwort
<i>Utricularia striata (U. fibrosa)</i>	fibrous bladderwort
<i>Utricularia subulata</i>	zigzag bladderwort

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