

Vegetarians



Parasitic plants are adapted to live off the hard work of other plants. Using specialized structures they invade the tissue of the host plant, extracting food, minerals and water. While they injure their hosts, they rarely kill them. There are over 3,000 parasitic plant species worldwide, most of which have a narrow range of host species.



Dodder, *Cuscuta gronovii*, producing flowers and fruit

The stem of **dodder**, *Cuscuta* species, slowly circles around searching for a nearby host. If it encounters a suitable one, it coils around the host and produces small appendages on its stem, which are modified roots called haustoria. The haustoria penetrate the host plant and extract food. Mature dodder plants look like yellow-orange spaghetti, with little or no chlorophyll. They flower but remain leafless.



Dodder haustoria penetrating coleus leaf



Fir mistletoe, photograph by Fred Baker

Traditionally used for holiday decoration, **mistletoes** are plant parasites. Mistletoe seeds germinate on a host tree and their modified roots penetrate into the wood. Since mistletoes have green leaves and stems, they produce a small amount of their own food. In this photograph, fir mistletoe, *Phoradendron pauciflorum*, parasitizes white fir, *Abies concolor*.



Flower of stinking corpse lily, photograph by Dan Nickrent

All *Rafflesia* species are parasites, producing no leaves, stems, or roots. They exist as living filaments within the tissues of the host plant. The only visible part to emerge from the host is the occasional spectacular flower. *Rafflesia arnoldii*, the **stinking corpse lily**, produces the largest flower of any plant. Most *Rafflesia* species are endangered, native to highly threatened habitats in Southeast Asia.