

## SENSITIVE PLANT

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Touch-me-not, Shy plant, Tickle-me plant, Humble plant, Sleeping grass

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Mimosa pudica*



### **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ADAPTATIONS:**

- Touch a leaf of the sensitive plant and it closes up as the tiny leaflets fold together. The leaf may even droop. Heat, wind, and shaking also cause the leaves to curl up.
- The rapid leaf-folding movement occurs due to a loss of turgor pressure (the force water applies to a cell wall to hold a plant upright). When touched, a chemical is released that triggers water to leave the cells.
- The stems have prickly thorns for protection.
- It is thought that the leaf-folding reaction may deter grazing animals or insects, allow rain to run-off quickly, and make the thorns on the plant more visible to potential predators.
- The leaves also fold closed at night and re-open at sunrise.
- It can fix nitrogen from the air, which enables it to grow in poor soils.

<b>Height</b>	Several feet
<b>Plant type</b>	Perennial, creeping, evergreen shrub
<b>Leaf</b>	Two rows of a dozen or so tiny leaflets
<b>Flower</b>	Small, pink or purple ball of fluff

**RANGE:** Throughout the Tropics (native to Central and South America)

**HABITAT:** Fields

### **REPRODUCTION & DEVELOPMENT:**

<b>Lifespan</b>	1 to 2 yrs
<b>Pollination</b>	Wind and bees
<b>Seed dispersal</b>	Bristles on seed pods cling to animal fur or clothing for dispersal. Seeds also disperse by floating in water.

### **INTERESTING FACTS:**

- It is a member of the bean family.
- The sensitive plant originated in Brazil and has been introduced throughout the tropics where it is considered an invasive species.
- In some areas, the sensitive plant is considered a weed as it can create a dense cover that prevents other plants from reproducing. In other areas, it is valued as a forage plant for livestock.

### **CONSERVATION:**

**Status in the Wild:** Common

**What is the Cincinnati Zoo doing?** The Zoo engages visitors in sensitive plant investigations at the Discovery Forest Wild Research station to deepen public engagement in conservation and science.

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**What can people do to help save plants and their habitats?**

- Grow more plants! Plants keep the planet healthy by taking in carbon dioxide, producing oxygen, and cleaning water.
- All plants are sensitive to chemicals in the environment. Use natural cleansers such as baking soda, vinegar, and lemon juice.

**RESOURCES:**

- U.S. Forest Service, [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us)
- Tropical Biology Association, [www.tropical-biology.org](http://www.tropical-biology.org)