

Ferns - Care Guide

Growing & Caring For Ferns

Although we categorise 'Hardy Ferns' all in one place on the website for ease of reference, there are, in fact, eight different genera of ferns which we offer. All of them have fairly unpronounceable Latin species names and some are very much hardier than others.

This article attempts to give more information on the different genera of ferns and to put them all into more perspective. It is, however, a huge subject and one which those gardeners who are fern experts may find all too brief and (deliberately) simplistic.

Nearly all hardy ferns grow best in full shade in dampish, moist conditions. If your garden does not have this available then most should be grown in a shady greenhouse with high humidity levels.

Adiantum Ferns

The Maidenhair fern

ADIANTUM pedatum, is a fully hardy deciduous species which grows 12-15in tall and originates from North America. It should be grown outside in moist, shady conditions. It has stout weeping rhizomes which produce lance-shaped, pinnate fronds on blackish stalks.

Asplenium Ferns

The Harts Tongue fern

ASPLENIUM scolopendrium, grows wild in our local woodland where it has happily naturalised itself in damp, shady but moist situations. It is an evergreen fern with short rhizomes and shuttlecock-like erect, upright, bright green leaves with wavy margins.

The Maidenhair spleenwort

A. trichomanes, is also a hardy evergreen fern whose creeping rhizomes produce lance shaped pinnate fronds on dark brown stalks. This is also a terrestrial species which grows in soil and is not an epiphyte. It grows to about 12in in height.

Athrium Ferns

The Lady fern

ATHRIUM felix-femina, is fully hardy in the very coldest conditions. Its fronds can be up to 4ft long and are lance shaped with red-brown stalks and light green. They can be variable in shape and this fern is also to be found naturalised in our woodlands where it dies down completely in winter.

The Japanese painted fern

A. niponicum var. pictum (syn. melallicum), grows to about 12in and is also deciduous. It has attractive silvery grey-green leaves with flushed purple red stalks. It makes a very good greenhouse plant when grown in shade or attractive edging to a border.

A. niponicum var. pictum 'Red Beauty': especially in spring when the broad silver fronds emerge, the 'leaves' are flushed with wine-red down the centre.

A. niponicum var. pictum 'Silver Falls' has silver leaves tinged with maroon.

Blechnum Ferns

BLECHNUM brasiliense 'Volcano' will tolerate some frost but is on the tender side as its name implies. Unless you can give its trunk like rhizomes a very heavy winter mulch under the evergreen leaves you may risk disaster. Its dark green fronds can grow to 3-4ft and are lance shaped and pinnate. The fronds are red-green when young.

B. spicant, the Hard fern, is entirely hardy and also evergreen. It grows to about a foot or so and has tufts of narrow lance shaped pinnate leaves.

B. tabulare is a tall growing evergreen fern which will tolerate dappled shade. It has numerous sterile fronds of dark green pinnate leaves and flattened even more erect greenish-brown fertile fronds. This is an architectural fern which deserves to be positioned where it can be seen.

B. chilense is often confused with *B. tabulare*. This species has naturalised itself by the pond at Burncoose and in large spreading patches in many other Cornish woodland gardens. It has very dark green (sterile) fronds on brown scaly stalks. It needs to be well established with good sized rhizomes before you will see fertile fronds appearing.

Dryopteris Ferns

DRYOPTERIS affinis 'Christata the King' grows, in maturity, to about 3ft and is fully hardy and virtually evergreen. Its arching fronds have handsome crested tips and pinnae. It will grow perfectly well in dappled shade but can readily be admired in a shady greenhouse.

D. cycadina is a hardy deciduous fern with shuttlecocks of lance shaped bright green fronds with mid green ribs growing to about 2ft tall.

D. erythrosora also grows to about 2ft tall and is deciduous. It produces a tuft of triangular pinnate fronds which are an attractive coppery-red when young and turning dark green as they mature.

D. lepidopoda, the Buckler fern, has an upright habit with colourful young growth.

D. sieboldiana, the Asian wood fern, is semi evergreen with broad leathery grey-green leaves. It prefers a sheltered location.

D. wallichiana, Wallich's wood fern, grows to about 3ft and is deciduous. It produces a shuttlecock of lance shaped two pinnate dark green fronds which are yellow-green when young. The midribs are covered with brown or black scales which makes an attractive contrast.

Matteuccia Ferns

The Ostrich fern or Shuttlecock fern

MATTEUCCIA struthiopteris, is fully hardy and deciduous; growing when mature to around 5ft. It grows well at the side of a pond or stream or in moist shade in the woodland garden. It is another rhizomatous species with erect 'shuttlecock' sterile fronds which are lance shaped and pale green. The fertile fronds are a contrasting dark brown with in-rolled margins and only appear in late summer.

Osmunda Ferns

The Royal fern

OSMUNDA regalis, grows up to 6ft and is deciduous. It is one of the most popular ferns amongst gardeners who wish to make large features of them near ponds and streams where, in time, they can grow into huge spreading but dense clumps. *O. regalis* will grow well in full sun with no shade protection provided the rhizomes grow in a really damp spot which remains damp all year. The triangular sterile fronds are a bright light green in profusion. In summer partially fertile fronds are covered with brown or rust coloured spores. The two colours make an excellent contrast.

Polystichum Ferns

Brawn's holly fern

POLYSTICHUM brawnii, has bright green feathered fronds and is extremely hardy and evergreen.

P. polyblephorum, Japanese tassel fern, is another evergreen species growing 2-3ft. It has shuttlecocks of spreading lance shaped fronds which are covered with golden hairs as they unfurl.

P. setiferum 'Herrenhausen' is one of the forms of the Soft shield fern and grows to about 1½-2ft. Again it is fully hardy and evergreen. Its dark green fronds are arranged in shuttlecocks and its pinnate lobes are bristle toothed and spreading in habit.

Tidying Deciduous Ferns For Winter



1. Select fern to tidy



2. Carefully remove spent fronds using secateurs



3. Cut fronds back closely to the crown



4. Be careful not to damage the unfurled fronds



5. Tidy up around the crown removing any weeds or pests



6. The fern all cleaned up for winter

Caring For Ferns - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/e56DRLuuXiw?rel=0>

Tidying Ferns - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/266fVc2vQy0>

How Do Ferns Reproduce - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/ayOxIU-x4Vg>

Gymnosperms And Angiosperms - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/VEUIeNuvSSY>

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