

Ferns for Central Florida

Ferns became popular indoor plants during the Victorian Era. Today, they are used as specimens in atriums, greenhouses and conservatories and we find them in the smallest apartments to the largest homes. They offer a quiet, graceful beauty by softening landscapes indoors and out. Ferns can be used as a groundcover, for borders, edges, backdrops or even specimens. Some species of fern grow vine-like and can climb trees. Some are even epiphytic and live up in the trees. Among the non-flowering plants, ferns and their relatives are unique. Numbering about 9,000 (with 100 native to Florida), they represent a wide assortment of plant forms.

Ferns are a group of plants belonging to the division Pteridophyta and are members of several Families. They are a fairly primitive group of plants having existed on Earth millions of years before the dinosaurs appeared. They were the dominant plant life during the Carboniferous Period.

Many ferns are easy to grow. Most need a shady location or one with filtered light and moist, fertile soil. Following are a few selected ferns that are easy to grow in Central Florida and can be found within the plant collection at Leu Gardens.

Acrostichum danaeifolium – Giant Leather Fern – Native from coastal central Florida to northern South America. This is the largest fern native to North America. It grows in clumps with the fronds reaching 5-10 feet tall. It likes a moist soil and will

even grow in shallow water. It also tolerates full sun.



Swamp Fern, new growth

Adiantum hispidulum – Rosy Maidenhair Fern – Native from Africa to S. Asia and N. Australia. This soft, lacy fern grows 1-2 feet tall. The fronds are a rosy pink color when they are new.

Adiantum trapeziforme – Giant Maidenhair Fern – Native from Mexico to South America. This is one of the larger Maidenhair Ferns and can grow 2-4 feet tall.

Angiopteris evecta – King Fern – Native from Malaysia to Polynesia to N. Australia. This is a massive growing fern. The fronds can reach 10-20 feet long and it can develop a trunk several feet tall. This is a spectacular fern but it is tender to cold so should be grown in a protected location.

Asplenium nidus – Bird's Nest Fern – Native to the Old World Tropics. This is a commonly grown fern. The fronds are undivided and a bright green color. It can be grown as an epiphyte. Grows 1-2 feet tall.

Athyrium nipponicum 'Pictum' – Japanese Painted Fern – Native to E. Asia. This fern is very hardy to cold. The fronds are a metallic gray blue. Grows to about a foot tall.

Blechnum brasiliense – Dwarf Brazilian Tree Fern – Native to Brazil and Peru. This fern is not a true tree fern but can develop a trunk 1-2 feet tall. The fronds are leathery and reddish-bronze when new.



Bird's Nest Fern

For more information about ferns, consider joining the The American Fern Society, which is over 100 years old. With over 900 members worldwide, it is one of the largest international fern clubs in the world. It was established in 1893 with the objective of fostering interest in ferns and fern allies. To this end, it encourages correspondence and the exchange of information and specimens between members via its newsletter *The Fiddlehead Forum*. The organization has "Fern Forays" into the woods every August. The field trips provide a wonderful way to learn more about wild ferns from experts and also afford an occasion to meet other people with a similar passion for ferns. See their web page at <http://amerfernsoc.org>.



Blechnum gibbum – Dwarf Tree Fern – Native to Fiji. This fern is also not a true tree fern but can develop a trunk up to a foot tall. The fronds are soft and finely divided.

Blechnum indicum – Swamp Fern – Native to central and south Florida and a wide area of the tropics. Swamp Fern is an easy to grow native. Fronds are up to a foot long and this fern spreads by rhizomes. It

will grow in moist or swampy locations but needs shade.

Cyathea cooperi – Australian Tree Fern – Native to eastern Australia. Australian Tree Fern is the most commonly grown tree fern in Florida. It grows on a trunk that can reach 20 feet tall. It has finely divided fronds that can be 3-5 feet in length. This tree fern is fairly fast growing and should not be allowed to dry out. It can survive temperatures into the lower 20's (F).

Cyrtomium falcatum – Holly Fern –

Native from southern Africa to southern Asia to Hawaii. Holly Fern is one of the most commonly grown fern in Florida landscapes. It is cold hardy and very easy to grow. The fronds are dark green and leathery. It grows to about a foot tall.



Mahogany Fern

Dicksonia antarctica

– Tasmanian Tree Fern – Native to Tasmania. This is one of the hardiest of all tree ferns. It is slow growing but can eventually form a trunk over 10 feet tall. It needs to be kept moist and in a shaded location with good air circulation. It can tolerate temperatures to around 20F.

Didymochlaena truncatula –

Mahogany Fern – Native to a wide area in the tropics from Africa to S.E. Asia to Polynesia. This fern has dark green, shiny fronds that are a mahogany color when new. It can have a short trunk with fronds 3-4 feet long. It needs a protected location, as it is somewhat tender to cold.

Dryopteris erythrosora – Autumn Fern –

Native to eastern Asia. Autumn Fern is a very cold hardy fern that grows about a foot tall. The leathery fronds are a coppery color when new.

Microsorium diversifolium – Kangaroo Fern – Native to E. Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand. This fern spreads rapidly by surface rhizomes. It grows less than a foot tall and makes a great groundcover. It will even climb a tree like a vine. The fronds are dark green and leathery.

Nephrolepis biserrata 'Macho' –

Macho Fern – This is a variety of sword fern that was originally found in cultivation. It is a fast spreading fern that grows 1-2 feet tall. It will even tolerate some sun if kept moist.

Nephrolepis exaltata

'Orlando' – Orlando Fern – This is a cultivated variety of Sword Fern. It grows less than a foot tall and has soft, finely divided fronds that are light green in color.

Nephrolepis falcata f.

furcans – Fishtail Fern – native to New Guinea.

This fern gets its name from the leaflets being forked like a fish's tail. It is a fast spreading fern that can grow in the sun if it is irrigated.

Osmunda

cinnamomea –

Cinnamon Fern – Native to North and South America and eastern Asia. This is a native fern that is very easy to grow. It reaches 1-2 feet tall and the new leaves are often covered with cinnamon colored hairs.

Osmunda regalis –

Royal Fern – Native to North America and a wide area throughout the world. This is another easy

to grow native fern. It will even grow in wet areas adjacent to pools of water. It can grow 2-4 feet tall.

Platynerium bifurcatum – Staghorn

Fern – Native to S.E. Asia and northern Australia. This is an unusual, epiphytic fern that can be grown on a slab of wood and hung from a tree or will even grow attached directly to a tree. The fronds can be several feet long and are forked at the ends. This is the most common species of Staghorn Fern and the hardiest. It will tolerate temperatures down to about 24F.

Rumohra adiantiformis – Leatherleaf

Fern – Native from Central and South America to southern Africa, S.E. Asia, Australia and New Zealand. This is a common fern that grows 2-4 feet tall. The fronds are dark green and leathery and are popular for use by florists.

Stenochlaena tenuifolia – African

Climbing Fern – Native to tropical Africa. This is a large, rampant growing fern that can be used as a large groundcover or will climb high into trees. The fronds are 2-3 feet long, leathery, and bright green in color.

Thelypteris kunthii – Southern Wood Fern – Native to S.E. U.S.

Southern Wood Fern is an excellent, hardy fern for naturalistic plantings. It will even grow on rocks and in the cracks of walls. The fronds are soft and it grows about a foot tall.

– Eric Schmidt



Southern Wood Fern