

# Outdoor Ferns

## General Information:

Being ancient plants, the ferns and their allies have long since become adapted to a wide variety of locations. From shady, moist sites in high woodlands to moist banks along streams and meadows, there are fern species for almost any situation. Well adapted to shade, there are some ferns which tolerate more sun, given enough moisture. Humus-rich soil is best for optimal growth of ferns. Adding compost, peat, leaf mold or other organic matter enriches the soil and retains moisture.

In the garden, ferns add beautiful texture, whether in a soothing mass of green under trees, or in compliment with flowering perennials. From a delicate lacy look to bold, broad fronds, there are endless uses for these low maintenance plants.

## *The following are some hardy ferns for this region:*

### **Adiantum pedatum:** Maidenhair fern

Fan shaped, dainty fronds, Beautiful airy appearance. 12-18"

Can spread into large patches, not invasive. Needs shade and constant moisture.

### **Athyrium filix-femina:** Lady Fern

Very common in SE PA, lacy, soft green fronds. 30-36" with good moisture. Many different forms available. Spreads slowly.

### **Athyrium niponicum "Pictum":** Japanese Painted Fern

Outstanding mounding fern. Fronds gray-green with reddish highlights. Color is best in light shade. 18". Good garden accent. Increases nicely.

### **Athyrium thelypteroides:** Silvery Spleenwort

Tapering fronds of soft green. Best in rich, constantly moist soil with some sun. 30-36". Spreads slowly.

### **Dennstaedtia punctilobula:** - Hay-scented fern

Light green, lacy fronds. Grows in sun or shade, moist or dry soil. 18". Can spread rapidly. Use as ground cover or contain it with a barrier. Scent of new-mown hay.

### **Dryopteris erythrosora:** Japanese Wood Fern, Autumn Fern

Glossy, stiff, deep green fronds. 24-30". New fronds a coppery-pink. Beautiful copper-bronze fall color. Evergreen.

### **Dryopteris filix-mas:** Male Fern

Deeply cut rich green fronds. 18-24". Attractive. Many interesting cultivars available. Spreads slowly.

### **Dryopteris goldiana:** Goldie's Fern

A giant specimen, to 4-5' in rich, moist woodland shade. Coarse, leathery texture. Light green fronds.

### **Dryopteris marginalis:** Evergreen Wood Fern

Leathery, dark green fronds. Evergreen, 18-24". Forms graceful clumps. Easy to grow. Best in light, rich, moist soil. Nice garden specimen.

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**Matteuccia struthiopteris:** Ostrich Fern

Up to 5', this fern forms graceful arching clumps. Wide fronds tapering to narrow base. Spreads quickly by underground stolons found along streams and waterside in moist soil, partial sun, it also grows well in ordinary garden soil. Produces its spores on feather-like crusty fronds which persist through winter.

**Onoclea sensibilis:** Sensitive Fern

Light green fronds, not divided. Coarse texture. Spreading habit can be invasive. Tolerates moist to wet soil, sun or shade. 18-24'. Called sensitive because it's the first fern to die back by frost.

**Osmunda cinnamomea:** Cinnamon Fern

Very tall, showy deep green fronds. 36-40". Fertile frond is narrow "breadstick" in early spring. Prefers wet soils, tolerates shade to sun. Differs from Ostrich Fern by its fuzzy tuft of white 'cotton' at base of each pinnae. Excellent background plant. Spreads slowly.

**Osmunda claytoniana:** Interrupted Fern

Good green, arching fronds. Looks similar to Cinnamon fern. Fertile fronds are in middle of each fronds, interrupting rows of pinnae. To 3-4'. Prefers drier soils.

**Osmunda regalis:** Royal Fern

Pale to bright green fronds, with angular leaflets. Spores found at tips of fronds, hence the common name 'flowering fern'. Up to 6' in wetlands, streams, bogs.

**Polypodium virginianum:** Common Rock Polypody

Best grown in rocks in semi-shade. Coarse, dark green simple fronds. To 10". Tolerates some dryness, but does better in moist environment. Evergreen.

**Polystichum acrostichoides:** Christmas Fern

Beautiful, dark green, simple fronds. Evergreen. Very elegant, clump forming fern. Prefers shade, but tolerates partial sun with moisture. 24-30".

**Thelypteris hexagonoptera:** Broad Beech Fern

Elegant small fern. Leaves broadly triangular, up to 24". Prefers sunny, open spots in woods, moist rich soil. Spreads well, but not invasive.

**Thelypteris palustris:** Marsh Fern

On long stalks, this light green fern does best in rich, sweet, and moist to wet soil. To 18". Beautiful fern for wetlands, pond edge.

**Thelypteris noveboracensis:** New York Fern

Fronds taper gracefully at tip and bottom. Nice delicate texture. To 18". Spreads quickly. Requires adequate moisture to stay good-looking through summer's end.

There are many other ferns worthy of your garden, but these are the best to start out with. Finding the right fern for the location can create a cooling, relaxed atmosphere to the garden. In addition, they are delightful in fresh or dried flower arrangements.