

Ferns from the Wild to the Garden

Leslie Duthie
Horticulturist
LADuthie@comcast.net

Ferns that grow in Full Sun:

- Hairy Lipfern** 6" to 8"
(*Cheilanthes lanosa*) Prefers sandy, organic soil mix in the rockery. Tolerates both acidic and limestone rocks in the northeast. Full sun.
- Blunt Lobed Woodsia** 5 to 16"
(*Woodsia obtusa*) This species has erect fronds and makes a lovely addition to the rock garden. Easy to grow in rocky outcrops and full sun.
- Rusty Woodsia** 3' to 8"
(*Woodsia ilvensis*) Erect-arching fronds the lower surface of the blade is covered in scales that turn to a rusty color when the frond matures. Another addition for the sunny rock garden or gravelly soil.
- Purple Cliff Brake** 4" to 8"
(*Pellaea atropurpurea*) The fern gets its name from the purple-black stipe. Prefers limestone or sandy slopes and full sun but will tolerate some shade. The fern has a gray-green hue to the fronds.
- Hay Scented Fern** 12" to 24"
(*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*) Aggressive, good for naturalizing in full sun to full shade. Excellent choice for under maples or difficult location. DEFINITELY NOT for a garden settings.
- Sensitive Fern** 8" to 20"
(*Onoclea sensibilis*) Tolerates a wide range of light conditions from full sun to shade as long as the soil is moist to wet.
- Royal Fern** 3' to 5'
(*Osmunda regalis*) Somewhat un-fern-like in appearance. This plant forms a nice large, arching clump with distinctive light cinnamon spores. Looks great with other big plants or as a background species. Full sun to full shade, wet conditions, a wetland obligate species.
- Virginia Chain Fern** 1' to 2'
(*Woodwardia virginica*) Like sensitive fern this plant will tolerate full sun to shade as long as the soil is moist to wet. Often found growing in wet meadows.
- Braken** 2' to 4'
(*Pteridium aquilinum*) A large unruly fern with broad triangular frond. It forms extensive colonies with a stout rhizome. Spreads rapidly and aggressively. Full sun to full shade, moist to dry soils.

Ferns that grow in Part Sun:

- Rock Polypody** 2" – 6"
Low growing, rock loving fern. Rock Polypody is tolerant of full sun to shade but prefers drier soils. Challenging to get established.
- Marsh Fern** 8" – 12"
(*Thelypteris palustris*) Although known as marsh fern it is also tolerant of average to wet soils. It will thrive in full sun as long as the soil is damp. A long creeping fern this plant forms nice colonies.
- Lady Fern** 2' to 3'
(*Athyrium angustum*)
And cultivars Excellent Fern! Many forms including red stemmed cultivar that is great with red or white flowered perennials. Fine textured foliage. Clump former for specimens, naturalizing, or background. Dry-ish to moist soils.

| | |
|--|--|
| Maidenhair Fern 12" to 18" (<i>Adiantum pedatum</i>) | Our most popular fern, a good colonizer. Nice as a specimen or in mass plantings. Best in rich soil and part to full shade. |
| Ostrich Fern 3' to 4' (<i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i> <i>v. pensylvanica</i>) | A fern of flood plains, this is the "fiddlehead fern" that can be picked and eaten. A vase shape fern, forming colonies where it grows. It is slow growing, but once established the colony spreads. Seasonally moist soils, part sun to full shade. |
| Slender Fragile Fern 5" to 12" (<i>Cystopteris tenuis</i>) | Most common on rocks and soils. Good ground cover in dry to moist soils. Not aggressive, however, spreads nicely. |
| Silvery Glade Fern 2' to 3' (<i>Deparia acrostichoides</i>) | Beautiful woodland fern for our gardens with silvery color from the whitish juvenile sori and fine hairs along the stipe and blade. Prefers damp woods and rich soil. |
| Male Fern 12" – 18" (<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>) | Rare in New England, but found around the Great Lakes and farther west. An attractive fern for the garden. Many interesting leaf forms are available. |
| Hart's Tongue Fern 6" to 10" (<i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>) | On this plant the leaves are un-fern-like. A strap leaf this grows well in moist to dryish soils, it prefers are more neutral soil but will grow in acidic conditions. |
| Long Beech Fern 8" to 18" (<i>Thelypteris connectilis</i>) | Long creeping but slow growing fern. Beautiful growth form makes a stunning pattern in the garden as it grows. Good ground cover or for naturalizing among wildflowers. |
| Broad Beech Fern 6" to 12" (<i>Thelypteris hexagonoptera</i>) | Attractive foliage, more coarse than the species above. This fern makes an excellent ground cover and a good companion for wildflowers. Found in moist, rich soils. |
| Brauns Holly Fern 10" to 28" (<i>Polystichum braunii</i>) | Beautiful crowns of lustrous fronds which does well in cool gardens. Fiddleheads, then rachis and stipe are densely covered with silvery scales that turn golden in time. |
| Goldies Fern 3' to 4' (<i>Dryopteris goldiana</i>) | Broad, arching fronds. Common to cool moist woods often near water. Good for loamy organic soils. Great specimen or background plant. |

Ferns for Deep Shade:

| | |
|---|---|
| Marginal Wood Fern 2' to 3' (<i>Dryopteris marginalis</i>) | Evergreen fern common to woods and rocky slopes. Nice for naturalizing or as a "thread" through the garden, blends well with garden perennials. |
| Oak Fern 4" (<i>Gymnocarpium dryopteris</i>) | This low growing fern has beautiful form and is adapted to growing in very acidic, damp soils. Great ground cover. |
| Interrupted Fern 3' to 4' (<i>Osmunda claytoniana</i>) | Unusual form with fertile pinnae found among the sterile. Interesting plant for a moist to wet location in part to full. |
| Cinnamon Fern 3' to 4' (<i>Osmundastrum cinnamomea</i>) | Somewhat aggressive. Common to wetlands. Attractive fertile fronds give the plant it's name. Good foundation planting for the north or east sides, nice along fences. |
| Christmas Fern 12" to 15" (<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>) | Attractive, evergreen fern is great for very shady locations in either moist to average loam. Clump forming species which spreads very slowly. |

Netted Chain Fern 12"
(*Woodwardia areolata*) This fern is unique and unusual. The frond is reddish green as it emerges and becomes glossy dark green at maturity. Dimorphic, the sterile and fertile fronds are different. Average to wet soils.

Ferns for Special Places:

Hay Scented Fern 12" to 24" (see ferns for sun)

New York Fern 8' to 12" This is a long creeping fern that is aggressive. Not a great candidate in the garden
(*Parathelypteris noveboracensis*) Excellent for naturalizing along fences, under maples.

Bulblet Fern 8" to 15" Moderate spreading fern. Not too aggressive and makes a nice ground cover in rich, moist soil. Excellent plant for slopes or walls.
(*Cystopteris bulbifera*)

Purple Cliff Brake 4" to 8" (see ferns for sun)

Dwarf Maidenhair 6" to 8" Just like the regular full-sized Maidenhair fern, but this is a dwarf. Must have limestone or neutral soil to thrive. Grows in part sun to shade. Great for rock garden.
(*A.pedatum ssp. subpumilum*)

Ebony Spleenwort 4" to 12" Another addition for the rock garden that prefers gritty humus among limestone rocks. Ebony spleenwort has erect fronds with light green pinnae and black rachis
(*Asplenium platyneuron*)

Maidenhair Spleenwort 4" to 6" This lacey spleenwort has arching fronds forming tiny green mats in rock crevices. It has tiny pinnae along a black rachis.
(*Asplenium trichomanes*)

Walking Fern 2" This small fern that crawls over rocks by forming new plantlets at the end of long leaves. Loves limestone rock.
(*Asplenium rhizophyllum*)

Rattlesnake Fern 6" to 12" Fronds are broadly triangular. An unusual specimen for the rock garden or a garden with smaller plants. Prefers cool moist woods.
(*Botrychium virginianum*)