

Ferns



A fern is a member of a group of vascular plants that reproduce via spores and have neither seeds nor flowers. They differ from mosses by being vascular, i.e., having specialized tissues that conduct water and nutrients and in having life cycles in which the sporophyte is the dominant phase

Ferns are among the oldest living plants on earth and there are both indoor and outdoor types of ferns. They normally have fronds (leaves) that drape and flow, adding a dramatic touch to a garden or indoor setting.

More than 20,000 known species of ferns grow around the world. Outdoor ferns thrive best in partially shaded areas and those grown indoors flourish in bright light, provided they are not placed in the path of direct sunlight. Ferns rarely suffer from diseases or insect infestations.

1. *Asplenium scolopendrium*



A small upright fern that must have moist shade and shelter from midday sun. The tongue-shaped leaves need careful placing because they scorch easily and turn yellowish in bright light.

2. *Dryopteris affinis*



The king fern. This will thrive in dry shade once established, although it will grow in moist soil, too. All newly planted ferns must be watered in their first growing season. This upright fern gets big, up to 3ft (90cm), but the dark green crests on the top of the frond and on the sides (the pinnae) add weight so the ends of the fronds.

It's graceful as well as robust but be aware that the fronds do deteriorate by midwinter. Cut them right back to the bare brown knuckles, as low as you possibly can, and the fronds will reappear with the bluebells, usefully covering foliage of early miniature bulbs such as snowdrops.

3. *Polypodium x mantoniae*



A fern for dryish shade once established. Once it's happy it will produce three types of frond: plain, crested and heavily lacy. This is a good ground-cover fern because

polypodies are wider than they are taller. It will meander and saunter along without being an aggressive spreader.

4. *Athyrium filix-femina*



This feathery airy-fairy fern needs moisture because the fronds will shrivel if it becomes too dry.

5. *Polystichum setiferum*



The architectural fronds appear in April, it's evergreen and it's no bother because you can grow it in a border in dappled shade, though not deep shade.. Polystichum means "many-bristled"

On good soil it will become large and luxuriant; you can divide a mature crown, should you wish to, between April and August. – ferns are best planted small and left to develop.

Most ferns are divided in the growing season between April and August. The exception is the summer-dormant polypody which needs to be tackled in August or September once it starts into growth once again.